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IN THE PAINT

SLAM no. 191 | FEBRUARY 2016

ROSTER

34. Bear Witness

Must-see college hoops in the Bay? Thanks to coach Cuonzo Martin and possibly the best freshmen class in the country, the **Cal Bears** will be just that.

38. Harder Than Them

Already one of the game's most interesting players, **Chris Bosh** now has a story that includes coming back from a life-threatening health issue.

42. Catch The Wave

With unchallenged leadership responsibilities on and off the court in Houston and a new high-profile sneaker deal, fan favorite **James Harden** is bringing the funk every single night.

52. I Changed A Lot

He and his Warrior teammates not named Stephen Curry can get overlooked, but no one should ever forget how important **Klay Thompson** is to the Champs.

57. SLAM presents Stance

The fashion story of this NBA season is the super-fly socks that have been gracing the feet of NBA ballers on the court and fans off it. The company behind this movement is **Stance**, and we've got the story of their rise in a special, 16-page section.

74. My Name Holds Weight

One of the coolest—not to mention effective—NBA players of the '80s was a crafty, wiry guard out of the southwest named **Lafayette "Fat" Lever**.

PG. 52

Klay Thompson keeps growing, and the Warriors keep winning.





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IN THE PAINT

SLAM no. 194 | FEBRUARY 2016



PG. 86

A high-flying forward who hails from the sticks of Arkansas, Malik Monk is a big-time prospect.

FRONTCOURT

16. Trash Talk

Old readers, old writers, new readers, new writers...and everyone in between.

19. Hype

Going back to the streets of Oakland with Dame, some hoop-friendly new tracks from The Game and a lesson on why Moses Malone is a member of the Hall of Fame. Plus DeMarre Carroll, Michael Eric Dyson and a book hint for DeAndre Jordan.

30. Kicks On Court

Put the latest shoes on black and light 'em right and the result is a work of art.

32. Slamadamonth

And Justise for all.

BACKCOURT

78. The Fan

What Santa Claus *should* wear this Christmas.

80. Kicks Off Court

Sneaker heat to combat the winter cold.

82. Check This

We're just out here making holiday shopping easy for y'all.

86. Punks

Introducing...Amir Coffey, Natalie Chou, Wenyen Gabriel, Malik Monk and Payton Pritchard.

90. Frozen Moment

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THE SIXTH MAN

I'd say we're in peak sock times, as evidenced by the mess on my desk at right, which is a good approximation of what my closet and dresser look like at home. While caring about socks may be a trend to some, it's old news to me...which, in a roundabout way, is why I'm loving the increased interest these days.

For me, it started even earlier than caring about shoes. By 7 or 8, I was steady rocking my joints all the way to the knee, even with shortish shorts. Did I look cool? Hell no! Did I look like a pro baseball or basketball player? Well, hell no to that, too, but I was more motivated by the latter than the former. By the time I had Jordan Is on my feet in fifth grade, I knew better than to yank up my socks, and at that point I'd taken my interest to a more formal venue. Church? School dance? Anytime I was supposed to look "nice," I had to rock "cool" socks. And to me that meant Argyle socks, ideally in the loudest colors possible. By the time I was playing JV, the Fab Five were rocking all-black socks for their games. I insisted our JV team did the same. When I went to college in Washington, DC, I fell in love with high socks again, thanks to the District's legacy of its great players sporting the look, as evidenced by legends such as Lawrence Moten, Moochie Norris and Walt "The Wizard" Williams. Post-college I landed at SLAM, where one of my first big responsibilities was reporting for a cover story on my then-beloved New Jersey Nets. My favorite player on that team? Kerry Kittles, by a long shot. And what was he famous for? You know...

Other than always trying to score official NBA game socks, my next sock memory isn't clear until '07-08, when Nike started making Elite socks. Then one day I took my daughter to a New York Liberty game. JR Smith, a Knick at the time, was sitting courtside. He had on shorts, Chuck Taylors, and some of the flyest socks ever, pulled almost all the way to his knees. And I knew socks would start popping again. Next thing you know, Stance is changing the game with incredible designs and performance—and joining the #SLAMfam via our annual Draft Suite. Then our fam joined Stance when Tzvi Twersky left us to run Stance's basketball category, leading to important office "meetings," aka our infamous sock drafts.

Today, we're making entire sections dedicated to Stance's dope socks (pgs. 57-72, thank you very much) and swimming in the best socks on the market. The only thing I need now is a Mark Jackson sock in the Stance Legends line. Amen.

Peace,



Ben Osborne



OFF THE BENCH Max Resetar

A SLAM Editorial Intern for the entire 2015-16 academic year, Max's history with the mag goes back to ish 72 (September, 2003), the "UNDISPUTED" Tim Duncan Champs cover, which he scooped at a Waldbaum's down the block from his house in Queens. Max has read—and owns—every issue since then. After coming to us via our main man Bobbito Garcia and doing some occasional writing and office work in 2013-14, Max formally joined the team this past August. While he busily works his way through his senior year of college while playing for his school's team (the incredibly named New School Narwhals), SLAM is about the only thing keeping him sane.



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SLAM

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STILL COOKIN'

Players can have a breakout season and that's exactly what Stephen Curry did. Some are saying he's overrated, but in my case, I think it's LeBron who is overrated. Nothing against him but I think people who are Cavs fans worship him like he's some type of basketball God. Other players can be just as good as him.
Dominique Warren // via Facebook

It's been forever since I've written you guys (dating back to the original one and done Cats cover). Chef Curry deserved that last cover, and no doubt he's going to be cooking throughout this season. I appreciate the consistency and quality content you guys pump out month after month, but I did have a request: could you guys give some ink to Travis Grant and Elmore Smith? They dominated in their college heyday at little known Kentucky State and more should know about that.

MATT DOSS // VIA EMAIL

Mr. Grant was the subject of an awesome Old-School feature in SLAM 172 (November 2013). Better look through your collection! Don't think we've ever had Elmore Smith in, though.—Ed.

This season you just previewed is going to be a whirlwind. Potentially Kobe's last season (nobody knows what that guy is gonna do anymore), another

year of the stacked Cavs roster and the MVP competition is going to be off the charts. The Spurs made one of the biggest offseason free-agency moves, signing LaMarcus Aldridge. Maybe that'll give Timmy D a reason to retire. Maybe 2016 will be the year that the Clippers finally get to the Finals. Or maybe LeBron freakin James is finally going to bring some joy to Cleveland. And we all know these rookies are gonna be up to something big. Getting SLAM is my favorite part of the month.
JAKE WALLS//GEORGETOWN, DE

Uncle Ed, wtf is going on in the L? KD basically put it on front street that he don't fuck with Stephen A. Smith and that he doesn't like the media. Well, KD, if you come to the Lakers, long as you helping win championship, you ain't gotta talk to nobody. Then Melo thinks the Knicks are competing for champi-

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INSTAGRAM OF THE MONTH

@southeast_supreme
First time I ever heard of Lamar Odom was in this 1997 issue of Slam no. 15, when he was in high school. Always was a fan of his game.
#SlamMagazine #Slam #MySlam #LO #TheGoods



onships? Really? Speaking of the Knicks, wtf is going on with D. Fish and Matt Barnes beefing over Gloria? As the whole world knows, I'm part of Lakers Nation, so I feel some type of way about this situation because Fish kicking it with Matt's wife/ex-wife ain't cool. We won championships together. Bros before hoes. Plus, Fish is an NBA coach. You can't be in the streets causing havoc. You don't hear about Steve Kerr, Pop, David Blatt, etc.

Shout out to SLAM, too. A few months ago y'all covered Post Malone talking about his song "White Iverson." I know that it's old now but our prison ain't shit. We get everything late and they took BET/VH1 away. I just heard that "White Iverson" and I think it's hot. Dudes in here (my roommate) be hating tho. Enjoy this 2015-16 season as OKC reminds y'all how special they are.

TAY DA GR8 // PENDLETON, IN
You again?!—Ed.

If this was the '80s, Stephen Curry would be on his back, tonguing some blood dripping from his nose...I don't know? Maybe a little chin music from the Bad Boy Pistons perhaps? If this was the '90s, Steph Curry would be roughed up at half court, hand checked up by squads like the Knicks and the Bulls perhaps? BUT...ifs are like assholes—everyone got one! MVP Stephen Curry's Time is NOW and at this point, ifs, haters, question marks and excuses will have to take a back seat to reality! All these doubters, all these questions, and all these ifs can look up at that banner hanging in Oracle Arena and deal wit all these Treys, all these Handles, and all these WINS!!!
MIKE VERDERBER // SAN DIEGO
YOU again????!—Ed.

NOTHING BUT LOVE

I think I was about my son's age when I first found SLAM. It worked for me because it melded my favorite sport with the music I was finding myself

obsessed with. A true "in yo face" mag. I followed SLAM like the older heads followed *Sports Illustrated*. All throughout junior high and high school (when I could finally afford my own subscription) and beyond, I've collected SLAM mags. I've always said SLAM is the realest hip-hop mag in the game, it just happens to cover basketball. Issue 192 earns my undying gratitude by shouting out Sean Price (RIP) in "Line of the Month." Best article in the issue was the cover story, when you reached out to—who else?—a pair of local rappers to help summarize the sentiment of a city. Good looks. I'm from Boston, so I think the mention of Bill Simmons to HBO deserves more than a raised eyebrow! Speaking of the Bean, I'm predicting over 42 games won for my Celtics and at least a 6th seed come Playoff time. Barring any unfortunate circumstances though, I def see the Cavs making it to the Finals this year again.

If my math is right, next June when those Finals are going on, should put us right at that hallowed TWO HUNDREDTH ISSUE mark! That's a landmark occasion, and one that necessitated my very first write-in to the magazine I liter-

from SLAM's entire print run! Call it a goldmine for my kids, who have been reliving Scoop Jackson rants and classic SlamUps ever since. Twenty years and 192 issues later it seems things have come full circle. Issue 10 was gold. Issue 50 was dope. No. 100 was the greatest magazine I've ever read (word to Ryan Jones, who sent me that custom SLAM-fitted himself). But I have a feeling SLAM 200 will top them all. So in anticipation of that hallowed event, I'll be releasing my own tribute. I call it "Countdown to #200." Let the games begin.

THE G-TEAM // BROCKTON, MA

Even better than 1G of the month [top right]? Thank you either way!—Ed.

What's up, Best Mag in the world? I felt great today when I got the mag but not the best because I'm in the box for a while and I'm gonna miss the whole season. And I think it's gonna be very good, especially with Bron and the Cavs charged up (perfect title) after that sham of a Finals! Respect to the Warriors but imagine if Mike went to battle with Utah without Pippen and Grant! I like Bron but I love the Mamba and L.A. As I stated in my love fest for both a few issues back



Johnson. Thanks for being y'all and please continue to save me this season with more great articles. And make Russell earn a cover. Oh yeah, that high school kid Alkins looks like the real deal. I hope he's not faking like the rest. #PrayersForPearl #BKALLDAY #GatesAve **ARQUET // WOODBOURNE BOX, NY**
P.S. If y'all print this, let me get some Ed love.

Covered this request at the top of this section.—Ed.

At the moment, I am on lockdown on this slave plantation called NY Dept. of Correction and in honor of my daughter

My name is William Burns and I'm currently locked up right now, and I've been a SLAM Fan for 10 years. I'm currently a two-year subscription holder, but I've been reading SLAM since I was 12 years old. I want to thank SLAM for keeping me updated the last two years while I been locked up. Now shout out to them Warriors they did that. Them haters was like Harden should win M.V.P. but I won't be surprised if Westbrook splits it. And no, the GSW cannot shoot themselves to a title ha ha ha, what do you got to say now? Stephen Curry is a future Hall of famer. Steph Curry is the truth. Now I wanna give a shout to my favorite player D-Wade. I hope I could see D-Wade on one of these up & coming SLAM covers. All I got to say is the East better watch out because Miami Heat is on a mission this next season. Now NBA players, you better watch out for that boy Ben Simmons. I see him being the next LeBron James. I see Ben taking LSU to the sec. I'm sorry to say it but it has to be said: James Harden will never win a ring unless he go back to OKC. Houston is not a good fit for James Harden. I'm sorry James, but it's true. Now on that note I'm leave by saying the next finals will be a rematch GSW VS Cavs. Them golden boys will win again in Game 5 at Golden State... splash splash splash. **WILLIAM BURNS // WALLA WALLA, WA**
Holla holla.—Ed.

TWEET OF THE MONTH



Jarrett Adams
@WarReportRadio



Follow

Yo @nbarank is mad corny only list that matters is @SLAMonline top 50

ally grew up with. I decided to go for your Instagram of the Month trophy in honor. After so many illuminating discussions with my two very inquisitive sons (who, with the help of *NBA 2K Legends Teams* and their old mans reminiscing, have a voracious interest in legendary teams, players and moments of the game), I decided to hit the storage bin and dust off some of my old archives. All told, I think I'm missing less than 10 issues

in Trash Talk. But I gained so much new respect for him after that Final. As for the LakeShow, I love the Russell pick. I was rooting and betting that L.A. did what they did. I think Okafor will be good but Russell is special. I love college ball and he's the best PG I seen, maybe ever. I'm from BK so I root for the Nets except when they play L.A. But that crowd at Barclays is horrible! That Brooklyn chant is great but besides that they are more laid back than Joe

Destiny Telleria. I promise I share her ball thoughts and dreams which is for SLAM to finally give female players their props with a cover as you do the incoming rookies. By putting the female dream team (2015-16) of Maya, Taurasi, Delle Donne, C. Parker, Griner, McCoughtry, Skylar, Catchings, Tina and new girl on the block Breanna Stewart (next season) on the SLAM cover can only mean "Damn, SLAM always gets it right and keep it real."

MIKE JAMES // WALLKILL CF, NY



RULE THE COURT.

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THE OPENING TIP

Always by Rick Telander

Hey, a guy's gotta have friends, right? It doesn't matter if he's broke or has millions, a male human needs some boys or boyz or cowboys to kick it with. Of course, it's easier to have those folks around if you have that incredible wealth, if for no other reason than that at any time you can buy them all cheeseburgers, or new phones, or Escalades. And you never have to worry about who's going to pick up the champagne tab. You.

Ask Allen Iverson—reports were that when he was starring for the 76ers, he sometimes had as many as 50 people in his rolling pack of freeloaders, a kind of undulating blob of humanity that Iverson claimed he enjoyed and needed.

Back in olden times in pro

sports, groups of hangers-on were called pals, and if they weren't used as body guards, they were few in number and without many demands. That all changed in the NBA when gargantuan, guaranteed contracts kicked in, and many first-round picks were kids not long out of high school, without knowledge of the real world. They had money and nobody to help them spend it. So they brought along buddies from the gym, siblings, dubious relatives, would-be assistants, sychophants, wannabe rappers, etc. to their new cities, and sometimes their homes resembled nothing so much as adult sleepover camps.

The word "posse" came to define such crowds, with no reference to ranchers deputized

to go after cattle rustlers. "Entourage" became a later term for such groups, hinting at a veneer of respectability, because a posse may be a mooching carload of idiots with mischief at its heart, but an entourage often has a quasi-sensible adult somewhere in the cluster, possibly a lawyer or agent or—ta-da!—a personal fitness chef.

I started thinking about entourages again last summer when rising Bulls star Jimmy Butler signed his first mega-contract—a max five-year, \$95 million deal—and the quiet kid from Tomball, TX, seemed to have glitter in his eyes. He had just gone to Paris for new pal Mark Wahlberg's birthday. And he admitted to an ESPN inter-

viewer he paid for five people to travel with him to everything now, but he had hired them all for various jobs. "I don't have an entourage," Butler said, not too convincingly. "I'm not Mark Wahlberg...They comfort me, they humble me, they never let me forget where I'm from."

Poor Lamar Odom once told wife Khloe Kardashian he was paying rent for 20 friends and cell phone bills for 30 more. Entourages, like LeBron James' massive one, can help a guy out. Or they can help a guy out of everything, as they did for Iverson, who burned through \$150 million with his peeps before declaring bankruptcy in 2011.

Like Turtle said, "Don't talk to us like we're adopted, bro." But remember, they likely are.

IN YOUR FACE

NWTS

DEMARRE CARROLL

Atlanta Hawks, 6-8, F

We won't get too sentimental here, but the Atlanta Hawks do miss DeMarre Carroll. The Hawks were a gritty band of brothers starting to come into their own. Carroll, a 6-8 grinder who's worked his whole life to defy the odds, was their rock. When the League said, "Look, y'all can bring four players to the All-Star Game. Who's it gonna be?" Carroll bowed out like a gentleman. Every other night, when the team needed somebody to dive for a 50-50 ball, the Junkyard Dog got the floor burn. The city will never forget that.

"I don't think a lot of people can wake up every day and play hard," the Alabama native says. "Some people might be lagging. But if you can get up, go to work every day and work just as hard as the day before, that's a talent. That's how I feel on the basketball court."

After an unbelievable postseason (six straight games over 20 points), everybody not living in denial knew that Atlanta would probably have to break up with the 29-year-old free agent. And sure enough, when it was time to find a suitor this past summer, Toronto whispered all the right things to DeMarre.

On the surface, the new union looks promising. The Raptors have a solid cast (DeMar DeRozan, Kyle Lowry), a steady coach (Dwane Casey) and super crowds at the Air Canada Centre. "I'm excited," says Carroll, who is averaging 12 ppg in 36 mpg through the first two weeks of the season. "I think Atlanta was a good level for me. But coming to Toronto, with the fan base and playing for a whole different country, the excitement level is through the roof."

One can only hope that Toronto appreciates what it's getting. Atlanta certainly knows what it lost. But the old adage says, "If you love something, let it go," right? Well, on December 2, DeMarre Carroll returns to Philips Arena. There will be some pre-game smiles. Probably a few tears, too. As for embraces, though, the closest thing you'll see is Carroll defending the Hawks so tightly it'll look like he's reaching for a hug. —**DEMARCO WILLIAMS**



NOYZ

So maybe we should have done the rookie cover *this* season.....Holy smokes Andre Drummond!.....Andrew Janik, do you still read NOYZ? Or just do awesome illos? Figured we'd make this the easiest test possible.....We're still waiting on that Rich Kleiman call.....Katie Nolan's KD interview was phenomenal.....As much love as SLAM covers have gotten over the years, and trust, we appreciate the love more than you know, the gallery of covers we *wanted* to do would honestly be as impressive as the ones we did do. Does that make

VAGUELY LITERARY

DeAndre Jordan, the book for you is *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. It's a classic that everyone reads in middle school or high school, even today with the Common Core State Standards. We all learned that it's really about the Russian Revolution and rise of Stalin. Animals stand in for various historical figures, as we learn about the dystopian version of the Socialist model, where the workers do everything and bosses have the money and power but none of the suffering.

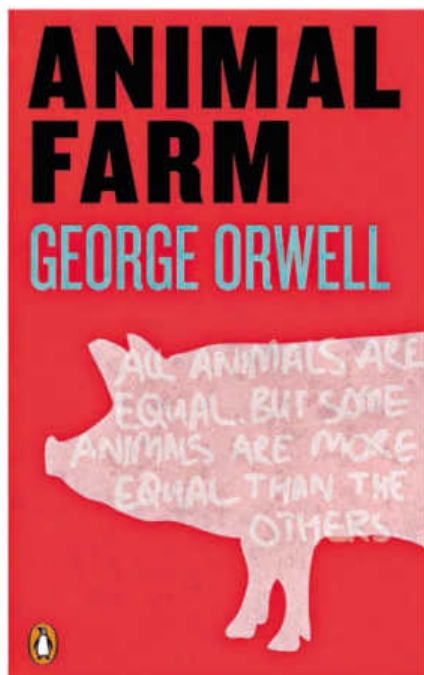
Listen DeAndre, you signed a huge deal, you are going to make over \$150 million in your life. This is incredible. Still, you will never have the money or the power of your boss Steve Ballmer. Sure, he goes to games dancing like a lunatic, buying material happiness for his workers with locker room gifts, and he puts a big happy face on decades of Clipperdom. That's what the more fortunate animals on the farm get to do. Some animals are more equal than others.

Your Clippers successfully ousted Donald Sterling, a rare sports revolution where the public felt sympathy for young,

gifted millionaires. In the novel, the farm animals rise up and get rid of the farmer. All's well that ends well? Not exactly. On the court you're still stuck behind Golden State, a reunited Durant and Westbrook, maybe even Houston and San Antonio. It could take something as drastic as revolution to get the Clippers where they need to be. All the money in the world won't make those ordered playoff fouls go away.

And then there's your summer drama. When your whole public relations disaster with Mark Cuban unfolded, some people were like, "How dare this ungrateful spoiled brat make a promise and then not be man enough to look him in the eye!" You don't owe Mark Cuban anything; you were a free agent, you took care of yourself. Look to your point guard, who you are supposedly feuding with. He's the leader of the Player's Union, not your enemy. "They" will try to divide and conquer you, keep you blind to the true power you have. That's what they do on the farm. DeAndre, use your head, don't just be a guy who runs and jumps and can't hit free throws.

The season is taxing, but *Animal Farm* is a short read, something you could have done when waiting out that silly free-agent signing blockade. You said you killed time that day by playing video games and ordering food, which is fine, but if you make the time for *Animal Farm*, you might wake up to what's happening all around you. —SAM RUBENSTEIN



Carroll: Juan Ocampo/NBAE via Getty Images; LTM: Andrew D. Bernstein/NBAE via Getty Images; Noah Graham/NBAE via Getty Images; Russell: Atiba Jefferson



ROOKIE DIARY with D'ANGELO RUSSELL

Opening night...

was cool, it was an amazing experience. Emotions were high. I had a lot of people at the game, but once I broke that first little sweat, the butterflies left my system right away.

The biggest adjustment...

is the speed of the game. It's way faster than college. It's way more, man, the vibes are just different and the atmosphere is different at the arena. I'm not worried at all, though. We're going to get on a roll.

At first...

just being on the floor with some of the guys, like Kevin Garnett, was my God! Like, I'm here, I made it. It was cool. That feeling lasts until the game starts. That's when, I'm being 100, you get it out of your system.

People have...

written about it, and it's true: Rajon Rondo is my man. That's my guy. He just tells me to keep going at people. We're from the same city [Louisville], there's a little bit of a bad rep around the city, so he says play like you don't have friends out there and go at everybody.

I'm still...

watching a ton of basketball outside of our games. I wouldn't say I'm admiring anyone, but you do try stealing a little bit from everyone's game. I try to see what everyone is doing and take from that.

As for...

my hair, I'm just experimenting. Just experimenting. We'll have to see when I settle on a style. I don't know. Keep an eye out, though, and we'll talk next month!

Line of the Month

BY SHANNON BOOHER

LYRICS OF THE MONTH: "I hopped up in that Maybach/I know I said I wouldn't but sometimes a nigga gotta crossover like AI/I crossover like Steph Curry, crossover like CP," "Just Another Day"; "No hesitation like Steph, shoot it right in your face/'Cause I'm a Golden State Warrior strapped with a K," "New York, New York"; "So I must be Klay with the .38/Thompson with the Thompson," "The Documentary 2"; "I was light skin and young—Klay Thompson, nigga," "Life"; The Game pays homage to the reigning champs with his latest albums—*The Documentary 2* and *The Documentary 2.5*.

ANOTHER SEQUEL OF THE MONTH: In a land of purple and gold, a fading star is forced to trek over a rocky Western landscape accompanied only by novices and castoffs. His future bleak, will this gunslinger use his remaining time to propel his crew to a return to glory or to self-destruct, blowing up everything and everyone in sight? Coming soon: *The Martian 2*, starring Kobe Bryant.



sense?.....Brock Turnipseed is the man.....Shouts to Chris Burns for the courage—and the long-time reading of SLAM!.....When ballers turn to junkies it fucking sucks.....Shouts to Marty Rosen for his awesome work honoring the great Erasmus Hall teams of the '50s and '60s. Keep an eye out for more where that came from. Brooklyn hoops didn't start with Bernard and Albert.....We were never sold on Jerry Wainright as a big-time coach, but that letter-writing he does that we read about in the WSI sure sold us on him as a person.....Yo, NCAA—clear Cheick Diallo already!!!!.....Are there hanging chads? Oh yes there are.....

TRUE TO THE GAME

Town Business

The hard-knock city of Oakland made Blazers PG **Damian Lillard** the man—and basketball player—he is today.



SLAM: What are your earliest basketball memories?

DL: Just shooting from across the street with the rounded curb and then it bounced back and hit the street—just learning how to shoot like that. Shooting on the street with my cousins. Shooting on milk crates on telephone poles. We had tree branches that were shaped like a hoop—it was a branch that came off of the tree that looped around like the front of the rim. So we would be shooting over it like it was the front of the rim.

SLAM: You grew up in a rough part of East Oakland—who kept you on the basketball path?

DL: My dad. He was just always pushing me to do things. Before I played on the AAU team, he was like, “Man, I got this traveling team you can play on. You’ll get to meet new people.” That was in, like, the fifth grade.

When I started doing that, that’s a whole summer of practice, tournaments, traveling. So that’s taking me out of Oakland enough for the summer. That’s where I grew that serious love for it and wanted to be a part of it. So I give a lot of credit to him.

SLAM: I know you met Steve Francis at a young age. Do you remember meeting any other players or coaches when you were growing up?

DL: The one with Steve Francis, that was the only real run-in that I had that was just him standing there. But me and my brother used to sneak in the back at Golden State games all the time. We’d be right outside their locker room when they were going to the parking lot. We would meet them all the time. That was like Adonal Foyle, Tony Farmer, Mookie Blaylock. I was a Warriors fan.

SLAM: Who were your favorite players?

DL: I was a fan of Mookie. I liked Chris Mills. I was a fan of Antawn Jamison, Larry Hughes, Gilbert Arenas, Jason Richardson.

SLAM: What East Oakland spot was most important to your development?

DL: The rec center, playing against older kids—there was one full court and two baskets on each side. There was somebody playing on each one, every day. If you wanted to play, you had to compete. If you wanted the court, you had to play. You couldn’t be scared. People got mad and one thing led to another and fighting broke out and all kinda stuff. You coming on your own, you gotta defend yourself and be willing to play against bigger kids. That situation was huge for my growth.

SLAM: Do you remember the first

NBA jersey that you owned?

DL: A Miami Heat jersey. I got it at All-Star Weekend. It was 2000. All-Star Weekend was in Oakland. I remember I got a Miami Heat jersey, but I put my name and number on it.

SLAM: How about your first ball?

DL: I was like 10. My first Spalding ball—my dad ordered it off Eastbay Magazine. I’d take it to the rec. Every day I had my ball with me. I actually left it up there. I had it for a whole summer and then toward the end of the summer I left it in the gym one day and I haven’t seen it since.—**ADAM FIGMAN**

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NOYZ

Never change, Z-Bo.....Oh, Gilbert. Just talk to us and clear up all the BS!.....If everyone liked mags as much as Khaled we'd be caked up.....We don't know what type of player he'll turn out to be, but Frank Kaminsky definitely has some d-bag in him. And re: point one, "not as good as Justise Winslow" seems a safe bet.....Did you guys catch that New School Narwhals shirt Max is wearing in Off the Bench? FLAMES.....Any time we get frustrated about our web functionality we look at the Sun-Times'. RT deserves better.....



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THROWBACK

FO' REAL

The ever-reliable **Moses Malone** led the Philadelphia 76ers to the 1983 Championship.

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The season ticket brochure for the 1977-78 Philadelphia 76ers included a photograph of Julius Erving's wristbanded right hand and forearm, the index finger extended toward the heavens.

Or, perhaps, a Championship.

The Sixers had blown a 2-0 lead in the '77 Finals and fell in six games to Portland. The fallout from the late Darryl Dawkins' comical Game 2 fight with Maurice Lucas and a barrage of George McGinnis bricks was another Philadelphia sporting disappointment and brought a promise from Dr. J that "We owe you one." Thus, the photo.

That finger remained outstretched for six long years, through the improbable '78 Eastern Conference championship round meltdown against Washington, the Magic Miracle in the '80 Finals, the 1981 ECF choke job against Boston and the 1982 title series bowdown to L.A. By the 1982-83 season, the running joke in Philadelphia was that the Sixers' credit line was just about exhausted. The team's fans were tired of IOUs. It was time for the franchise to make a payment.

Only one man had the coin to pay up. Moses.

On September 15, 1982, the Sixers traded center Caldwell Jones and a first-round pick to Houston to acquire the League's best pure rebounder, Moses Malone. No longer would the team be susceptible in the middle. Jones and Dawkins were game—and in Dawkins' case, a lot of fun—but Malone was a relentless, 6-10 board monster who was in the midst of a seven-season run in which he would lead the League in rebounds six times. In '81-82, he had been a Leviathan, averaging 31.1 ppg and 14.7 rpg in a League-best 42 sweat-soaked minutes a night. The Sixers signed Malone to a then-unheard-of six-year, \$13.2 million deal and stuck him into the middle of a core that



included Erving, Mo Cheeks, Andrew Toney and Bobby Jones. The NBA title wasn't necessarily won that day, but the Sixers certainly established themselves as strong favorites.

Philadelphia won a League-best 65 regular-season games, then the fifth-most in NBA history. And with Malone averaging 24.5 and 15.3, Philly was no longer the entertaining—though ultimately disappointing—team it had been the previous six seasons. It had been fun to watch Doc dunk, but it was time to win it all. When he joined the Sixers, Malone had been deferential. "I know it's Doc's show, and I'm happy to be part of Doc's show," he said. "Doc'll still be the show, but maybe now it will be a better show."

Erving was the headliner, but Malone was the reason the Sixers had been transformed. It was sometimes comical to watch him amassing three and four offensive rebounds—off of his own misses—on the same possession, and media members had to get used to his third-person Moses-speak, but

nobody in the League worked harder on the court, and that was exactly what the flashy Sixers needed. In Malone, who died in September at the far-too-young-age of 60, Philly had the perfect, hard-hat-wearing pivotman.

Lakers fans grouse that had rookie James Worthy not broken his leg in '83, and Norm Nixon not separated his shoulder in the first game of the Finals, things would have been different. Yeah, maybe L.A. might have won a game, and the Sixers' "Fo-Fi-Fo" Playoff would have been amended. But why argue semantics? Malone made sure 1982-83 belonged to the Sixers. His uncompromising interior play steered a team that had lacked a sturdy spine at a time when the NBA was still pivot-centric. Acquiring Malone transformed the Sixers from an entertaining basketball show into a deadly serious hardwood force. By the time the Sixers swept away the Lakers, all the debts were settled.

Philadelphia didn't owe anybody a damn thing.—MICHAEL BRADLEY

Scott Cunningham/NBAE/Getty Images

NOYZ

FWIW, Brandblacks are mad comfortable....Yo Charley H—keep up the good fight, dude....For Pete's sake—we just saw a Pete Nice mention on social media for the first time in a long time. We had such high hopes for him....Maybe the Sixers would have a bright future if robots could play basketball at a high level. Alas....Bard Beal is a great nickname if the Wiz 2g ever wants to moonlight as an actor....Now the Nets care about their Jersey heritage? GTFOH....



DIME DROP

DEEPER THAN HOOPS

Public intellectual **Michael Eric Dyson** understands the way sports bleed into everyday society better than most.

Michael Eric Dyson is perhaps America's freshest scholarly voice in the social dialogue surrounding race, class, gender and poverty. *The New York Times* columnist, MSNBC political analyst and Washington Wizards season ticketholder caught up with us recently to share his wisdom on a variety of basketball-related issues.

SLAM: Your writing carries a distinctly rhythmic, almost musical voice—not only in presentation but also in lens. How does the auditory element frame your use of language?

MED: I grew up in Detroit listening to the Pistons on the radio. I actually heard basketball before I saw it played professionally live. It was stunning to imagine Dave Bing or Jimmie Walker going up against Nate Archibald and the Cincinnati Royals at Cobo Arena. Visualizing the tiny lefty putting 40 points on us with little effort was amazing. This was critical to my intellectual life, as hearing is a function of learning.

SLAM: You have spoken to several NBA rookie classes. What is the general purpose of your talks?

MED: These are young men with deep pockets and open oppor-

tunities. I try to give them some societal understanding of what that all means and how to comport oneself. These talks are also for the coaches, as they need to appeal to their players intellectually and culturally. I imagine that the rookies see me as some pontificating professor or preacher. In fact, I officiated Carmelo's wedding.

SLAM: The first game you ever saw was with Pete Maravich, whom you described as an "alchemical magician." Who are some of the more inspired geniuses you have witnessed on the hardwood?

MED: The greatest force is Michael Jordan—and LeBron James is the greatest athletic spectacle. Nobody can ever do what Jordan did. He was a pioneer in terms of broader commodified hipness and upper echelon economy. But ball on floor, footwork, complicated shots (with difficult delivery of those shots), court intelligence, and understanding to be manically obsessed with every detail of the game and the physical fitness it demands—there is nobody better than Kobe Bryant. He is Jordan-esque but to another degree.

SLAM: In addition to being a distinct signifier, you have also



referred to Allen Iverson as the toughest pound for pound athlete in any sport.

MED: Allen Iverson essentially exposed the country to the beautiful complicated masculinity of black men when he forged the hip-hop aesthetic in the arenas of America. The body ink, which is now the norm, was at the time a repudiation. Tattoos were for Iverson a necessary gesture of self-expression that in many ways transitioned one generation to another.

SLAM: In Can You Hear Me Now?

you lament the NCAA's "deep rooted" pathology in its treatment of student athletes.

MED: It's said to be an amateur sport and yet the coaches, athletic directors and schools are making millions of dollars literally on the backs of these players. If we induce capitalism as the adjudicative force in the marketplace—the compensation of getting a college education is good, but it is hardly the fulfillment of what they deserve. It's really about taking a hard look at the exploitative practices of our young people.

SLAM: Why have sports become such a cauldron for race, politics and substantive conversation?

MED: The NBA held a panel with Kareem, Corey Booker, Bill Bradley and myself where we addressed our nation's tremendous history of civil rights and the lingering problems of rhetorical and actual violence directed at specific groups. Athletes are entertainers. But in the absence of strong unity in the community, we turn to them, right or wrong, as voices for direction. Sports doesn't always transcend differences or even ideas. Race is not a card—it's a condition. —**DR. L.A. GABAY**



Jalan West, Northwestern State (LA): Leading the nation in assists is pretty good. Being top-20 in points per is also pretty good. Combining both of those is even better. Northwestern State point guard Jalan West put up averages of 20 ppg and 7.7 apg in '14-15, helping to lead his Demons to a 19-13 record. The Bossier City, LA native is lightning quick, with the desire to take big shots and the skill to make them. West is going into his senior season as opposing defenses' top priority—but good luck. West can get to the rim at ease and he has a knockdown shot.

Kelsey Plum, Washington Huskies: Plum finished the 2014-15 season with a 22.6 ppg average, including 87 percent from the line and 40 percent from distance for the Washington Huskies. She's got a beautiful stroke that lets her light up defenses from all over the court, both off the dribble and off the catch. The lefty from La Jolla, CA, dropped 45 points at Oklahoma to begin her second campaign, which set the tone for her entire season. If her sophomore year was any indication, Plum's jumpshot is going to torch even more defenses over the coming months. —**MAX RESETER**

PICTURE ME BALLIN'



NOYZ

A little bit like comparing apples and oranges, but sometimes we wish Steph looked out the same way Bron does....Way to go, Mizzou!....Huge shouts to Courtney Barnett for KILLING the parallax game on our behalf!....Even if he's long since moved on from chronicling Gary Payton, we still mess with David Shields heavy....What Li-Ning launch event???....What happened to the camel anyway?....When we really make it, we're doing conference calls from helicopters....Big news in the mag business when

Dyson: AP Photo/Earl Gibson III; West: Gary Hardamon/Northwestern State; Plum: Washington Athletics; Abdul-Jabbar: Walter Ioss Jr./NBAE/Getty Images

A Beautiful Mind

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has evolved into the most prominent politically minded athlete of our time.

Who could have predicted that the most political, thoughtful and consistently interventionist athlete of 2015 would be a 68-year-old Hall of Fame legend, a man who spent most of his career not talking?

But that's the case with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Young Kareem was part of a singularly political group of athletes while also winning three NCAA titles at UCLA. As a 20-year-old college sophomore known as Lew Alcindor, he was at the table of the Ali Summit where Jim Brown, Bill Russell, Bobby Mitchell and a host of other athletes pledged to support Muhammad Ali in his efforts to resist being drafted into the Vietnam War. In 1968, he did not participate at the Olympics out of solidarity with John Carlos, Tommie Smith and the other rebel athletes of the day.

Then Kareem went to the pros for two decades and gave us at most a thin political gruel. He spelled out why he was so quiet—reporters called it sullen—in his 1985 memoir *Giant Steps*. Here he explained his

discomfort being in public and his belief that a white-dominated media never gave him a fair shake. "I've had to deal with that ugly blend of racism and envy my entire career," he wrote, "and what it's done is sharpen my killer instinct, made me super-intense. If I've become aloof and almost impervious to criticism, it's because I've come to expect it. Still, it never feels good."

Surely the changing times also fed Kareem's move toward being more reticent. Today, it seems like Kareem is feeling, if not good, then at least confident in his belief that if he opens his mouth, his voice will be heard. His columns for *TIME* magazine's website and *The Washington Post* have a tendency to go viral and his takes straddle the line between meditative and searing.

There are many examples to choose from but my favorite was when Kareem compared Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Kareem dismissed the mainstream media's take that they were two peas in a pod because they

were "outsider" candidates. Instead he pointed out what makes them different.

He wrote, "Ernest Hemingway once said that courage was 'grace under pressure.' Two presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders, have recently tested this proposition. And how each man responded revealed the type of person he is and the type of president he would make: Trump authored his own doom, and Sanders opened immense new possibilities as a compassionate person and serious candidate for president."

The comparison was how Trump reacted to being challenged on his history of sexism, contrasted with the ways Sanders reacted after being pushed by the Black Lives Matter movement. Trump doubled down on his misogyny while Sanders actually shifted his platform and rhetoric to deal more with anti-racist and criminal justice issues.

The column actually got less press than the response. Trump sent Kareem a copy of

his article and scrawled on it with a black sharpie, "Now I know why the press always treated you so badly—they couldn't stand you. The fact is that you don't have a clue about life and what has to be done to make America great again!" It is certainly true that the press did treat Kareem badly. But guess what? Now he's part of the press and we are profoundly richer for the fact that this great man has chosen to share his voice.

As we went to press, he was at it again, challenging the GOAT himself, Michael Jordan. Many have ripped MJ over the years for his lack of a public social conscience, but few if any in the NBA have done the same. Yet here was Kareem on NPR saying, "He took commerce over conscience. It's unfortunate for him, but he's gotta live with it." For a player whose consistency and technical genius on court was once described as "boring," Kareem is the Dominique of pundits. Agree or disagree, he's a human highlight reel.



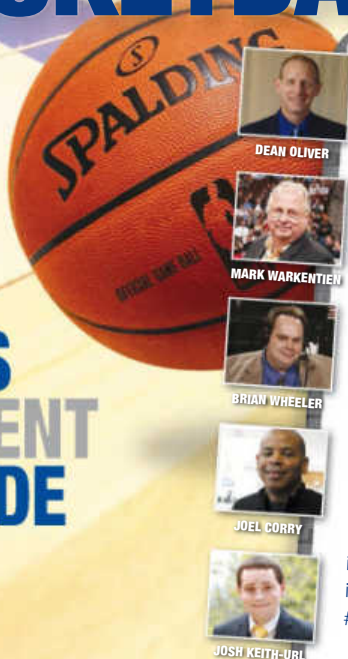
Southern Living does an A-B-C split.....Yo Bill Dwyre—credit your quotes!.....What's up with Cali-based sportswriters lately anyway? Simers, Simmons x2, etc.....Kyle Kuric stay up!!.....One of the few must-have SIs of the year was the College Basketball Preview. Not for the rankings, but the classic cover shoots and institutional knowledge. This year's cover had Eric Hosmer on it?!.....Tacko Fall is a saint.....Grantland..... Sites that don't make money and are operated by companies that need to.....Jim Barker.....Stanley Booth.....Mel Daniels.....Nate Huffman.....Dave Meyers.....Flip Saunders.....Scotty Stirling.....Michael Wright.....

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CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT:
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Under Armour Curry Two Out now, \$130
AND1 Tai Chi Out now, \$100
Reebok ZPump Rise Out now, \$125
Nike Kobe X Elite SE Out now, \$225







SLAM ADAMONTH

JUSTISE WINSLOW ON ANTHONY BENNETT

11 . 08 . 15
AMERICAN AIRLINES ARENA
Miami, FL

Justise Winslow was the 10th overall pick in the 2015 NBA Draft, which is fine and all—a dream for some—but not exactly what he was expecting. Heading into the Draft, top five seemed like a distinct possibility for

the Duke freshman. Instead he fell to the Miami Heat at 10, who were probably as surprised to find Winslow still available as they were to be picking there in the first place.

There are advantages to dropping.

of course. First and foremost, there is the possibility that an elite rookie lands on an already-good team, as Winslow did with the Playoff-ready Heat. And then there's the little matter of motivation. Falling a few picks

isn't the end of the world financially, and could even help situationally, but it still ranks. Ask Paul Pierce, the 10th pick of the 1998 Draft, how it made him feel. Hell, ask the 18-year veteran how it makes him feel now.

Winslow's game is still developing, as any 19-year-old's would be, but he's already an elite defender and, at 6-7, 225, a problem on the break. And if anyone should get in his way, well, Justise is served. —**RUSS BENGTSON**

With a loaded roster featuring young and NBA-ready players, Cal should be the most exciting college team in the country this season.



Bear Wit



From left:
Jaylen Brown,
Ivan Rabb, Jabari Bird,
Tyrone Wallace,
Jordan Matthews

nest
by Branden J. Peters



and have been tight ever since. So much so that Rabb's mom has become the impromptu team mother, cooking dinners for both guys and helping out with laundry.

Although Jaylen had a slightly higher national profile coming out of Wheeler HS in Marietta, GA—also the alma mater of the last Cal player with this much hype, Shareef Abdur-Rahim—being that they are playing in Ivan's backyard, Brown often jokes that he acts as his roomie's security when they are out and the photo and autograph requests get to be too much. With the drive, athleticism, work ethic and talent that both of these guys possess, sooner rather than later, they'll both be taking fan selfies and signing autographs from Berkeley to Brooklyn—if the team wins as much as pundits expect them to.

In a year that many thought would be a down one for the Pac-12, the Cal Bears should do a lot of winning. They have the ideal balance of youth, experience, size and depth—something that has not been the case in recent years. Cal goes five-to-six deep in the backcourt with Jabari Bird, Sam Singer, Georgetown transfer Stephen Domingo and Roger Moute a Bidias expected to get minutes behind starters Wallace, Matthews and Brown.

Despite the plethora of talent, everything starts with returning point guard Tyrone Wallace. Coaches selected Wallace as First-Team All-Pac-12 after his standout junior season; he was also a finalist for the Bob Cousy Award. Wallace sets the tempo on the floor at all times; he knows the system, so he's always vocal, whether he's

The addition of Oakland native Rabb (or Ive, as his teammates call him) and Brown as the catalysts of a top-5 recruiting class immediately catapulted Cal onto the radar of even the most pedestrian college hoops fan, as well as into the top 15 of most pre-season polls and lists—official and unofficial.

Both Jaylen and Ivan were recruited by Kentucky, Kansas, UCLA—traditional powerhouse schools—but they chose Cal for different but equally important reasons.

"A lot of people from the inner city don't get the opportunity [to come to Cal], so for me it was just another opportunity to prove [people] wrong that I could make it here, just like I made it at [Bishop] O'Dowd, [when] they said I wasn't intelligent enough," Rabb says.

"For me it was just getting away from home and experiencing something different," Brown says. "Twenty years from now I want to be able to tell my kids or grandkids what I did when I was 18 years old in Northern California other than just being at home and staying in my area for the rest of my life."

The irony of all the pre-season hype attached to the Cal program is that the two guys who are largely responsible for generating it couldn't care less about the premature accolades.

"All those expectations are cool, but we still have to play basketball," Brown says. "I'm appreciative of that and we're very blessed to be considered at such a level, but at the same time I can't pay attention to that."

Jaylen's fellow team member and roommate Rabb agrees wholeheartedly: "It doesn't matter, I think the rankings are more for the fan base, to get them excited and get more attention to the program, but at the end of the day we have to win games."

After spending any amount of time with Jaylen and Ivan, it's apparent that, despite being from opposite ends of the country, they agree on a lot. The two well-mannered, laid back stars arrived on Cal's campus early in the summer

The energy surrounding the Cal Men's basketball program these days is unlike any Bears fans have seen in a minute. There is an unmistakable air of confidence and focus that permeates through the coaches and the team. And why not? After a respectable 18-15 campaign last season—the first with coach Cuonzo Martin—he and his staff pulled off the best recruiting haul in the program's history, landing top-10 players Jaylen Brown and Ivan Rabb, as well as SoCal forward Roman Davis (who it was just announced will sit out this season as a redshirt). Add them to a trio of top-notch returning talent in four-year senior Tyrone Wallace, former McDonald's All-American Jabari Bird and the much-improved 2-guard Jordan Matthews, and the Cal faithful have a reason to be excited.

Very excited.

"We don't just talk about family, we try to live it. That's who we are, it's a lifestyle, it's a culture." -Martin

praising teammates or correcting them when they're in the wrong spot. As the only scholarship senior on the team, Wallace is also a guy whom Coach Martin trusts. The second-year general allows Wallace to make decisions that most coaches wouldn't allow, from what days to take off to fun stuff like what shoes to wear in a game.

Cal's upperclassmen are quick to give credit to former head coach Mike Montgomery's regime, but it is clear that the example Coach Martin has brought to Berkeley is something that his players respect. The healthy balance of competition and camaraderie among the team is a good indication. On non-game days, Martin will have players work out in the morning, followed by a two-and-a-half hour intense game-situation practice. After, the team sticks around to run shooting drills.

In the midst of the killer practices, the team also has a lot of fun. There aren't many major college head coaches who can rap word for word with 1990s Snoop Dogg records, but

that is exactly what you'll hear at workouts or during stretches in practice. Everything from old-school jams to Kevin Gates (players say that Martin loves the Louisiana rapper's "I Don't Get Tired") to Shy Glizzy gets rotation. At only 44 years old, Martin is old enough to have lived but young enough to relate, as is his staff.

The way that Martin leads while also giving his team freedom is part of the reason he and his staff have completely changed the culture around the program in such a short time.

"It can't be a dictatorship in this relationship because in order for those guys to grow, I have to let them make decisions," says Martin. Over the summer, the team went on a trip to Australia to play exhibition games against pro competition and even though they were nearly 8,000 miles from campus, Coach didn't give them a curfew.

College hoop fans of a certain age should remember Martin from his days as a lockdown defender and sharp-shooter under Gene Keady at

Purdue. He and eventual No. 1 pick Glenn "Big Dog" Robinson wreaked havoc on the Big Ten, winning back-to-back conference titles in '94 and '95 on top of an Elite Eight appearance.

Multiple injuries would cut short Martin's playing career, but he quickly found another calling in the game when a former Purdue coach hired him as an assistant in 2000. A promising stint at Missouri State as a head coach would lead to a less than ideal time at Tennessee, but for the man of faith who made it out of East St. Louis and beat cancer in his 20s, the debacle in Knoxville was just another hurdle to overcome.

As a lifelong Midwest guy, Martin never imagined coaching on the West Coast, but it has suited him well, partially because he brought a lot of home with him to the Bay Area. Martin's Associate Coach, Assistant Director of Operations and Strength and Conditioning Coach all worked with or played for him at some point. This tight-knit unit exudes family, a word that is used multiple

times when Martin, his staff and the players describe the bond they share.

"Everybody uses that word family, but I think family is displayed over time," Martin says. "We don't just talk about it, we try to live that, and that's who we are, it's a lifestyle, it's a culture. The relationships, the friendships, the respect we have for our players, not just as basketball players, but as young men, as well as students."

Whether Cal's freshmen take the one-and-done route or they stick around the school for a couple more years, it's clear they understand the importance of this season and the ramifications it has on the future of the program.

"Obviously I came here to win games, but I also came here to change the culture of the basketball team," Rabb says. "Berkeley has so much to offer as a school, so why not offer the academic side and the basketball side? We can be a big-time, huge program for many, many years and I think this is the year to really put us over the top." §

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Harder Than Them

Over the past year, CHRIS BOSH has dealt with life-let alone career-threatening-injuries.

His road back has been no joke, but the 10-time All-Star, ever the optimist, is back to doing what he does best.

by YARON WETTZMAN



CHRIS BOSH'S LIFE has, for the most part, been a fruitful one, full of accolades, prosperity and success. He's won championships and played in All-Star Games. He's made \$144 million on the court, and, via endorsements, a small fortune off of it.

And then there are the other gifts the game has given him, like the time and means to pursue his other interests. Bosh has made TV cameos and learned to play guitar; he's chilled with camels and brewed his own beer. "All these things," he says, "I couldn't have done if I worked a 9-5."

But like all human beings, despite his fame and fortune and freakish 6-11 height, Bosh has also dealt with the merciless side of life, and over the years he's developed a coping mechanism for such times.

"Don't worry," Bosh is fond of saying, both to himself and to his friends, those times when life hits hard, "the sun will come out tomorrow. Everything will be OK."

A "glass half-full guy" is how Dean Keener, the former Georgia Tech assistant who recruited Bosh out of Dallas' Lincoln HS, describes him. Bosh, he says, is the definition of a positive person, which is why he was so struck by the text messages he was getting from his former player and longtime friend back in late February. They were downtrodden, defeated and full of despair.

The few times the two did speak over the phone Bosh sounded nervous—and understandably so.

A week earlier Bosh had gone to Haiti for an All-Star Weekend vacation, only to have it ruined by an agonizing pain in his back and chest. He returned to Miami and checked into Baptist Hospital, where doctors discovered blood clots in his lungs. Bosh was also diagnosed with a pulmonary infarction; dead tissue had led to fluid build-up in his lungs.

A left shin contusion suffered a few months earlier seemed to be at the root of all these afflictions. But at the moment the why was irrelevant. All that mattered to Bosh, and those who know and love him, was that, for the time being, his life was in doubt.

"For me, it immediately brought me back to when I found out about Earvin ["Magic" Johnson] and his HIV diagnosis, and [Alonzo Mourning] needing

a kidney transplant—those are life-threatening diagnoses," says Heat president Pat Riley. "With Chris, this was the same thing—a condition that could be fatal. It was a very sobering time."

Riley also thought about another former player of his, Jerome Kersey. The Bosh family did, too. One day earlier, Kersey suddenly died at the all-too-young age of 52. The cause of death: A blood clot traveled from his left calf to his lung.

"It was scary," Bosh says. "I knew all about blood clots and how dangerous they are."

It took over a day for the blood thinners to do their job, after which Bosh was informed his life was no longer in danger. "That period beforehand—that was the most nervous I've ever seen him," Keener says.

As for the 31-year-old Bosh's playing career, well, that was a different story.

"I OWE EVERYTHING I've done to the game of basketball," Bosh says. "I've done so much in my life that I never dreamt I'd be able to, and it's all because of basketball."

It's a recent October afternoon, and Bosh is calling from his Miami home. He's upbeat and jovial, and enjoying a lunch of lightly fried snapper and broccoli. "Don't worry," he says between laughs. "[The fish] is barely dipped in oil. It's not that greasy spoon stuff."

He's answering questions about the past year, the trials he's endured, the pain he's felt, and how he overcame. He's introspective and thoughtful—"A renaissance man," Riley calls him. "He and Kareem [Abdul-Jabbar] are the two smartest players I've ever been around"—and Bosh's pensive mind serves him well when recalling the recent past.

"I'm just more appreciative of the career I have," he says. "I used

to question things a bit, wonder what I was actually contributing to society, wondering what I'd be doing if I wasn't playing ball. Especially after the championships, things got really hectic. Basketball was really difficult."

That word, difficult, Bosh used to think he understood what it meant. That was before he spent a week in a hospital room with fluid-draining pipes drilled into him as if his body was nothing more than a clogged kitchen sink. The thought of all that hardware resting between his ribs still sends shivers down his spine.

"It's such a hard feeling to describe," he says. "Unlike anything I've ever felt. Just a weird and tough experience."

One day in particular stands out as being the worst.

It was his third with tubes in his chest, and his body was adjusting to the morphine and slowly beginning to feel more pain. The walls of the room were closing in. He felt nauseous, and depressed, and dirty, too. Showering was forbidden. Instead, he was forced to clean himself with a wet cloth that seemingly never stayed warm. He knew he wasn't going home for three more days and he was sick of daytime TV. *Family Guy*, *SportsCenter*, *American Dad*—he felt he'd seen them all.

"I had an iPad, but I just didn't have the energy to do all that, set it up and everything," he says. "I just wanted to lay back. I couldn't deal with trying to get comfortable with the screen on me."

He'd use it to watch Heat games, but his zeal for life had disappeared. No longer was the glass half full. Bosh's wife, Adrienne, was constantly at his side, and he allowed his three kids to visit him once. He couldn't stand his kids seeing him in that state; the next time they saw him was when he returned home.

"He just looked so unhealthy,"

"I realized that playing basketball was what I was put on this earth to do. I'm 31 now—there's only so much more basketball I'm going to be able to play. My career is finite, and (I'm) more appreciative of it now than I ever was."



says Ed Downs, Bosh's trainer and friend. "That image of him lying there, it haunts me."

But, slowly, Bosh regained his hope. Little by little his fervor returned. It may manifest itself in different ways, such as crying after a high school championship, or NBA Finals loss, but Bosh has always been ruthlessly competitive. This is a person who in high school used to scan the PUNKS section of this magazine, then share with his friends why he was better than every player there.

"You can't have the career he's had if you don't have a little bit of dog in you," says Bosh's friend/former teammate Shane Battier.

Bosh just needed some time to rediscover that drive.

The first signs came toward the end of his hospital stay, when nurses rushed to Bosh's room after hearing screams.

"I was watching Heat games and getting into them," he says.

"I'm a yeller when watching my team, even though they can't hear me. Like the manager in *Major League II*, jumping up and down. The games gave me an escape, a way to feel normal for a couple of hours."

After a week of torture, an ecstatic Bosh was, finally, discharged from Baptist Hospital—only to forget to take his pain meds his first day back home. "I figured once I got out of there I'd be able to get back to being normal," he says. "I was wrong." It took four bedridden days for Bosh to get the go-ahead from his doctors, and when he finally did, his comeback didn't exactly get off to a roaring start.

First, he began with short walks with his wife. They'd bring their baby girl, Dylan Skye, in her toy car. A winded Bosh, down 13 pounds from his listed 235, would last maybe three houses before requesting to turn around. They'd do this every other day.

The slow progress frustrated Bosh, but he also felt invigorated. Confronting death had altered his perspective, but so had the threat of losing his career.

"I realized playing basketball was what I was put on this earth to do. I'm 31 now—there's only so much more basketball I'm going to be able to play. My career is finite, and [I'm] more appreciative of it now than I ever was."

Rejoining the Heat last season was out of the question, but Bosh quickly went to work on preparing for an October 2015 return. Downs had reached out to Dr. Cedric Bryant, the Chief Science Officer of the American Council on Exercise, so he could design the proper rehab plan, and then sent it over to Bosh, who spent the summer at his Santa Monica home training in a sweltering high school gym with Downs, former Arizona Wildcat star Miles Simon and a shooting statistics guru named Justin Zormelo.

Workouts lasted from 10:30-2, six days a week. He ran 100-yard sprints and focused on improving his balance and strengthening his core. By the end of the summer, Bosh added 20 pounds.

"After what I went through, when I'm tired I keep pushing," he says. Downs adds that he records Bosh's fitness numbers every year and this summer Bosh set career highs "across the board." "I came from a place where I wasn't doing anything," Bosh says. He's been to hell and back, and "knows what it's like to come close to losing it all."

Now, as he embarks on his 13th NBA season, and second in Miami without LeBron James, the future Hall of Famer has just one goal. It's what pushed him to return from the brink, what kept him going all those times when things were looking bleak.

"I want to win another Championship," Bosh says. "That's what all this is about." **\$**



CATCH THE WAVE

He's the best **PURE
SCORER** in the NBA.
He's also a **WORLDWIDE
CELEBRITY** and a
FASHION ICON. But the
only thing 26-year-old
HOUSTON ROCKETS
superstar **JAMES HARDEN**
really cares about is
GETTING BUCKETS. And a
CHAMPIONSHIP RING.
Last call to board his
bandwagon.

BY ABE SCHWADRON



A

AUDUBON MIDDLE SCHOOL

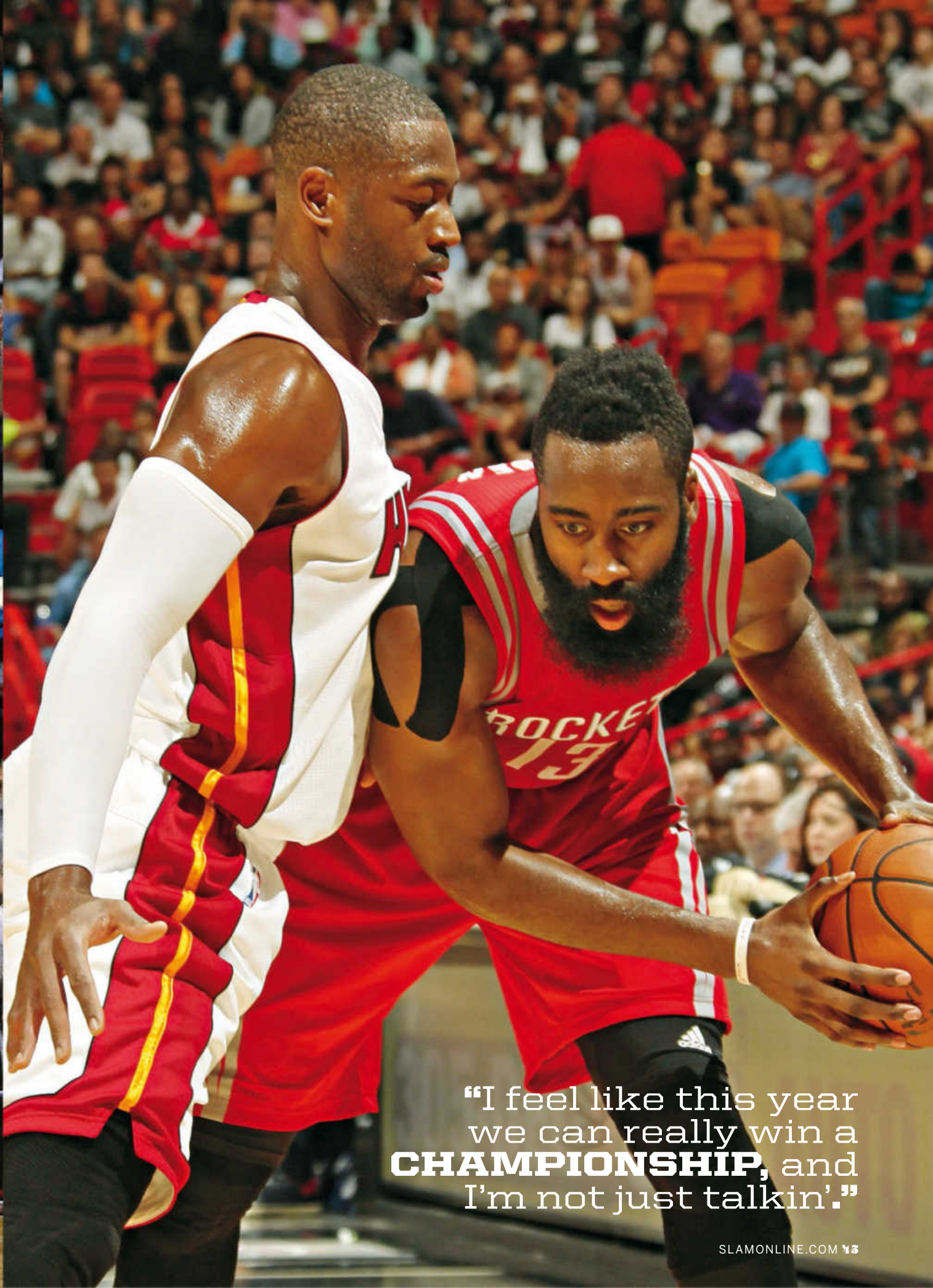
sits about 20 minutes southwest of downtown Los Angeles, inconspicuously located between Marina Del Rey and the campus of USC. There, students in grades six through eight are required to abide by a school dress code: gray uniform pants, white collared shirt. It's at Audubon that Camilo Valencia first noticed a fellow sixth-grader who, like himself, always had a basketball in his hands. But whereas most kids wore Dickies and Polos, this kid wore gray sweatpants and a white t-shirt. He was chubby, his cornrows were messy and he wore the same sneakers every day. His name was James Harden.

"James was never like, the handsome guy. He was always like the Black Swan of the bunch. Definitely not the best-dressed," Valencia says. "All the kids used to make fun of him. He wasn't fat, but he was a bit on the chubby side. Not athletic at all. But everyone knew him. He wasn't the most popular, but everyone knew who he was."

"Sometimes his braids would be half-done, and the other half not, with the 'fro. We were in L.A., so that's how it was," remembers Lorenzo "Zo" McCloud, another childhood friend. Zo, a year younger than the other two, eventually followed Harden and Valencia to the small local travel team, the L.A. City Wildcats, and then to Artesia High School. Bonded by the game of basketball, the three became inseparable. They'd spend the night at each other's houses and talk about making it to the NBA. They shared long car rides listening to Jadakiss. James' mother, Monja Willis, would cook for them after school, or Zo's mom would buy them McDonald's between practices.

"Everywhere we'd go," Harden says, "we'd just want to hoop."





"I feel like this year
we can really win a
CHAMPIONSHIP, and
I'm not just talkin'."



In junior high, Harden camped out in the corner and shot three-pointers, almost exclusively. But to the surprise of his boys, he made Artesia's varsity team as a 6-foot, 150-pound freshman. "Me and a couple other guys were the nice-looking kids. We'd play games with a headband on—we were the flashier players," says Valencia, who eventually joined his best friend on varsity as a junior. "But James had a more poised game. He never got sped up, he always stayed at his pace."

Harden seasoned his game on the summer circuit. After showing up at ABCD Camp before his junior year in 2005 a fish out of water, uncomfortable at first with the me-first style of play that often clogs things up at such HS All-Star summer camps, he got acclimated and he got busy. "The year he came back from ABCD Camp, he came back a whole 'nother player in the summer," says McCloud. "He came back like a whole 'nother dude. That's when I noticed like, Damn, he's on another level."

His averages hovering around

19 points, 8 rebounds and 3.5 assists per game, Harden led Artesia to back-to-back California state titles in his junior and senior years. In between, he earned a rep on the summer circuit. An ABCD All-Star, Harden also piloted his Pump-N-Run Elite AAU team to the 2006 Las Vegas adidas Super 64 championship, leveling competition like Michael Beasley's DC Assault and Kevin Love's Southern California All-Stars along the way.

A two-year stop at Arizona State, a trip to the Finals with OKC and one blockbuster trade later, Harden is the leading man

**"If you're not
CONFIDENT
IN YOURSELF,
you're not
going to
get anywhere
in life."**

on a team that finished second in the vaunted Western Conference last season. His beard has its own Twitter account. And he can scream "Swag!" at 3 a.m. out the passenger side of an SUV with tinted windows in Hollywood because fuck it, life is good.

ABOUT AN HOUR before a mostly meaningless mid-October home pre-season game against the Pelicans, some 30 rabid Rockets fans have assembled near where the home team's locker room lets out to the court, hoping to get some attention from their favorite

superstar. When he appears, Harden signs autographs for as many of them as he can reach. One kid wearing his No. 13 jersey even takes a shoe off his foot and hangs it over the railing—without hesitation, Harden scribbles his insignia and tosses it back.

When Harden's fans are satisfied, he begins his pre-game shooting routine. Right away, he seems a little upset. Upset, as in, he's shooting about 75 percent instead of 100. Even so, it's a dazzling display—a kind of "Around the World" utopia. He floats from one side of the court to the other, stopping to hoist five or six shots from each of a half-dozen spots. When he gets to the left side of the floor, Harden breaks the monotony with some creativity, planting off his right foot, jumping back, dropping the ball between his legs and flicking a floater up from the baseline off one foot. Swish. His incredibly acute dexterity even when it looks so damn awkward conjures thoughts of Dirk Nowitzki. But the way he rocks the ball back and forth,

toying with defenders, it almost makes you want to utter Rafer Alston's name, too. All that, plus he's left-handed with prototypical shooting guard size (6-5, 220) and he's averaged 10 free throws (aka 10 free points) per game over the last three seasons, too.

On this night, about a week before the real games begin, Harden coasts to 20 points against NOLA, watching much of the fourth quarter of Houston's blowout win from the bench. During one timeout, he tosses t-shirts into the crowd. Later, he jumps out of his seat to break out his signature cooking dance after Jason Terry drains a three.

The next day, Harden is on the set of an adidas TV commercial shoot at the Jerabeck Activity and Athletic Center at nearby University of St. Thomas, a Catholic school in the NAIA. The tiny campus is sleepy, save for the flurry of commotion in the gym, where bits of Drake and Future's "Jumpman" boom out loudly each time a production assistant hurls open the metal doors. Harden didn't make today's playlist, but he may as well have. He mentions the #WATTBA collaborators along with Meek Mill, J. Cole and Nipsey Hussle as the most-played music in his iTunes.

As more than a dozen extras bomb threes and crack jokes during a break from filming, Harden walks from the basketball court through a narrow hallway at the south end of the gym and into a racquetball court that's being used as a makeshift green room. Valencia gives a nod from his seat in a barber's chair, where he's getting a quick shape-up. Troy Payne, another longtime friend, leans against the wall next to Rob Pelinka, Harden's agent (who also reps Kobe Bryant, among others). Aside from a small woven basket with a few snacks, two folding chairs and a clothes rack draped in more adidas gear, it's empty. So when Harden speaks, his voice echoes through the room. He's wearing an all-white pair of adidas Crazylight Boost 2015s, white compression tights down to his calves and a white and silver hoodie with t-shirt length cutoff sleeves. He slides his chair back a few feet, sits down and leans forward. He's shuffling three different iPhones in his hands. If

he's overly fidgety, there's good reason. Harden is eager, in his own words, to "get that bad taste out of my mouth from last year."

"I feel like this year we can really win a Championship, and I'm not just talkin'," he says of this year's Rockets squad. "Last year, we had some really good pieces, we had a couple injuries that slowed us down. But we basically brought the same team back and added Ty Lawson, who's another playmaker, which we struggled with in the postseason. That right there gives us more versatility, gives us better opportunities, better efficiency on offense, which is gonna help our defense out. We've got more depth off the bench. So we're fully loaded. We just gotta stay healthy—that's the main key."

Multiple times per game during Houston home games, Dwight Howard's voice bellows throughout the arena in a team video on the Jumbotron: "I don't think we all came together just to make the Western Conference finals." At every turn, it's clear that Harden and the Rockets aren't satisfied with the way last season ended—with their superstar guard dribbling the ball off his foot and out of bounds in a fatal Game 5 loss of the Western finals against the Warriors. After carrying the Howard-less Rockets deeper than anyone expected them to go, Harden had a total of 12 turnovers that night, and Houston was eliminated.

Looking back, Harden shrugs it off. "It's over. We lost in the Finals and I didn't dwell on that," Harden says, referencing his 2012 Finals appearance with the Oklahoma City Thunder. "Then the next year I'm here in Houston. So I can't worry about that. I had to worry about my new role and things that I had to. The summer right after you lose, it hurts. But then it's time for you to get better and get ready for next year."

"A lot of people didn't think we'd make it to the Western Conference finals, right? We're not worried about what other people say or where we're projected," Harden continues, as he kicks off his shoes and begins unfurling his socks. "We're not worried about that. That's just people talking on what they think that's gonna happen. But for us, we're worried how can we get better and reach our potential."

COLOSSAL

James Harden's new relationship with **adidas BASKETBALL** is already showing signs of promise. We had no doubt.



About a month into #ThreeStripLife, James Harden is way, way up. His much-ballyhooed, reportedly 13-year, \$200 million deal with adidas kicked in on October 1.

"It's a blessing, to be honest. I'm definitely blessed in all measures," says Harden, adidas Basketball's new top dog. "Also, it's the work I've put in to prepare myself for moments like this. I try not to get too overwhelmed. I try to stay humble about it and just do what I do."

For the man who played the most total minutes in the NBA last season, taking care of his size 13.5 feet is as critical to his success as he is to adidas. Which is why so far, the H-Town king has been rocking the Crazylight Boost 2015 in various PE colorways concocted by the design team at adidas. Early on, Harden favored an all-white edition with pearlized collar panel for home games, but he's expanded to rock versions with red, black and even blue accents.

With his deal finally in place, sneakerheads are clamoring for a James Harden signature shoe. They'll just have to be patient—part of adi's pitch for The Beard to join the brand was the promise that he'd have a hands-on role in crafting his own kicks, which takes time and care. But Harden's excited at the way he's clicked with adidas already.

"The energy's there, the flow's there. The vibes are there," he says. "If the vibes are there, you tend to wanna get more work done. It's exciting for both parties—myself and the brand."—AS

Last season, Harden posted 27.4 points, 7 assists and 5.7 rebounds a night, and he managed to maintain his efficiency despite being one of the highest usage players in the League. In 2014-15, he was the only player in the NBA to post an offensive rating over 115 and use at least 30 percent of his team's possessions. In the last decade, LeBron and KD are the only other players to have accomplished that feat. And through the first two weeks of the 2015-16 season, Harden was already averaging career-highs in points (29.7), rebounds (5.9)

and unsurprisingly, minutes (39.4, tops in the entire League). He hung 43 and 46 on the Kings and Clippers in back-to-back Rockets wins in November. Of course, for a team that won 56 games last year, no one's getting excited until June. All offseason long, Harden asked for one thing from his teammates.

"Toughness," says Lawson, the speedy PG whom Houston brought in to help Harden see more time off the ball in 2015-16. "We don't want to get punked. On the offensive end or the defensive end. Just on the basketball court, period. You've got to be tough

“He didn’t change.
HE DON’T CHANGE.
His mentality is
A HARD WORKER,
and it’s still there.
Nothing’s changed
with that.” —McCLOUD







when you're playing this game, when you're down in the Finals or the Playoffs. You've got to be mentally tough to get through it, that's what he's tried to instill in everybody."

It's not difficult to trace the genesis of Harden's mental toughness. When you grow up in Compton, CA, there's only one place to really earn your stripes on the basketball court—the famed Drew League. Founded in 1973, the South Central L.A. league is the West Coast's answer to Rucker Park (though at present, it almost inarguably has surpassed the Harlem park in cache). The first time Harden played there, he was, in Drew League terms, just a kid. To veterans of L.A.'s best summer league, he was nothing more than an anonymous high schooler.

"I was impressed with him, but to be honest with you, I wasn't like, Wow, this is a can't-miss guy!" says Dino Smiley, Director and Commissioner of the Drew League for 30 years. "I've seen them all come through the L.A. area, from Baron Davis to Paul Pierce. He didn't have that 'it' factor then."

Even after he starred at ASU and went No. 3 overall in the 2009 NBA Draft to Oklahoma City, Harden was afforded no special treatment at the Drew. That all changed during the 2011 lockout, when the NBA's absence led to legendary exhibition showdowns across the country. The best was a surprise matchup between Harden and Bryant, the player he idolized growing up, at a packed-out Colonel Leon H. Washington Park. The crowd was so out of control, police helicopters began to hover above the gym. Here was Kobe in his prime, in East L.A., looking for a game. Harden stepped up and gave him 47 (or 44, depending on who you ask). Kobe went for 45 and the game-winner, but suddenly Harden had solidified his star status. A few months later, the lockout settled, he helped OKC beat the Lakers in a second-round Playoff series en route to the NBA Finals.

"I honestly feel that the Drew League has played a part of his style of play," says Smiley. "Because the Drew League is a very physical league. It's not

dirty, but it's just—you have to earn it. When guys step on the floor, they're not in awe of James, or anything. They wanna go at him. And I think he takes that same attitude on the floor. His eyes didn't get big when he first ran into LeBron and all these guys. He just wanted to go at them."

More than anywhere else, basketball-wise, Harden is at

playoffs, then leading LAUNFD past Nick Young and DeMar DeRozan in the finals on a game-winning three as Kevin Durant, Paul Pierce and Iggy Azalea sat courtside. "I'm not worried about having to prove myself because that's how I grew up. For me, it's just going out there and doing what I do. That's how I was raised. That's one of the reasons I still play in the



home in the Drew League. There are no analytics, no trolls complaining about his penchant for drawing fouls. It's put up or shut up. Get buckets or get booed. Just the way he likes it.

"That's how I grew up. We're basically in the hood. You have to prove yourself then," says Harden, who won his first Drew League title this summer, outdueling Klay Thompson's team in the first round of the

prospering. He didn't change. He don't change. His mentality is a hard worker, and it's still there. Nothing's changed with that."

Beyond the fact that Harden is a cold killer between the lines, he's also become a part of the League's culture itself. It was Harden who convinced KD to play at the Drew in 2013. And these days, of the Drew League's NBA regulars, Harden is by far the most celebrated. Smiley says even as a pro, before 2011 he would get recognized by the local cats, but generally James could "walk in the door by himself."

That summer, Harden was still able to hit up his normal neighborhood spots, like Roscoe's, and not get mobbed. This summer? It was bedlam every time he was in the zip code. "It was like a show in Vegas, man," he says.

Harden has taken to his new stratosphere of celebrity with zest in spite of the burden it brings with it. "At first, he didn't have paparazzi, it was just people coming up for pictures and things, but now he's got paparazzi," says Valencia with a laugh. "You know you made it, you doing something big, if the paparazzi is following you."

When Harden travels internationally, hundreds of fans wait at his arrival gate. While on vacation in Australia this summer, one dude wound up stalking him for an entire afternoon, tailing Harden in a taxi everywhere he went. Then again, as Zo points out, "You can't hide the beard."

Perhaps the only thing harder to hide than Harden's facial hair is his confidence. Does he think he should have won MVP last year over Stephen Curry? Yes. Does he think he's the best player in the NBA? Yes. He's repeated these things over and over. Like Kanye, or Donald Trump—whose private plane Harden once insisted on taking a selfie in front of for motivation—Harden refuses to bite his tongue, even if he knows the media is fishing for juicy headlines.

"It's always been who I am. I'm not shy at all. Speaking my mind, being who I am, wearing what I want to wear, just being very confident in myself," Harden maintains. "If you're not confident in yourself, you're not going to get anywhere in life." **\$**





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JAMES HARDEN, ROCKETS

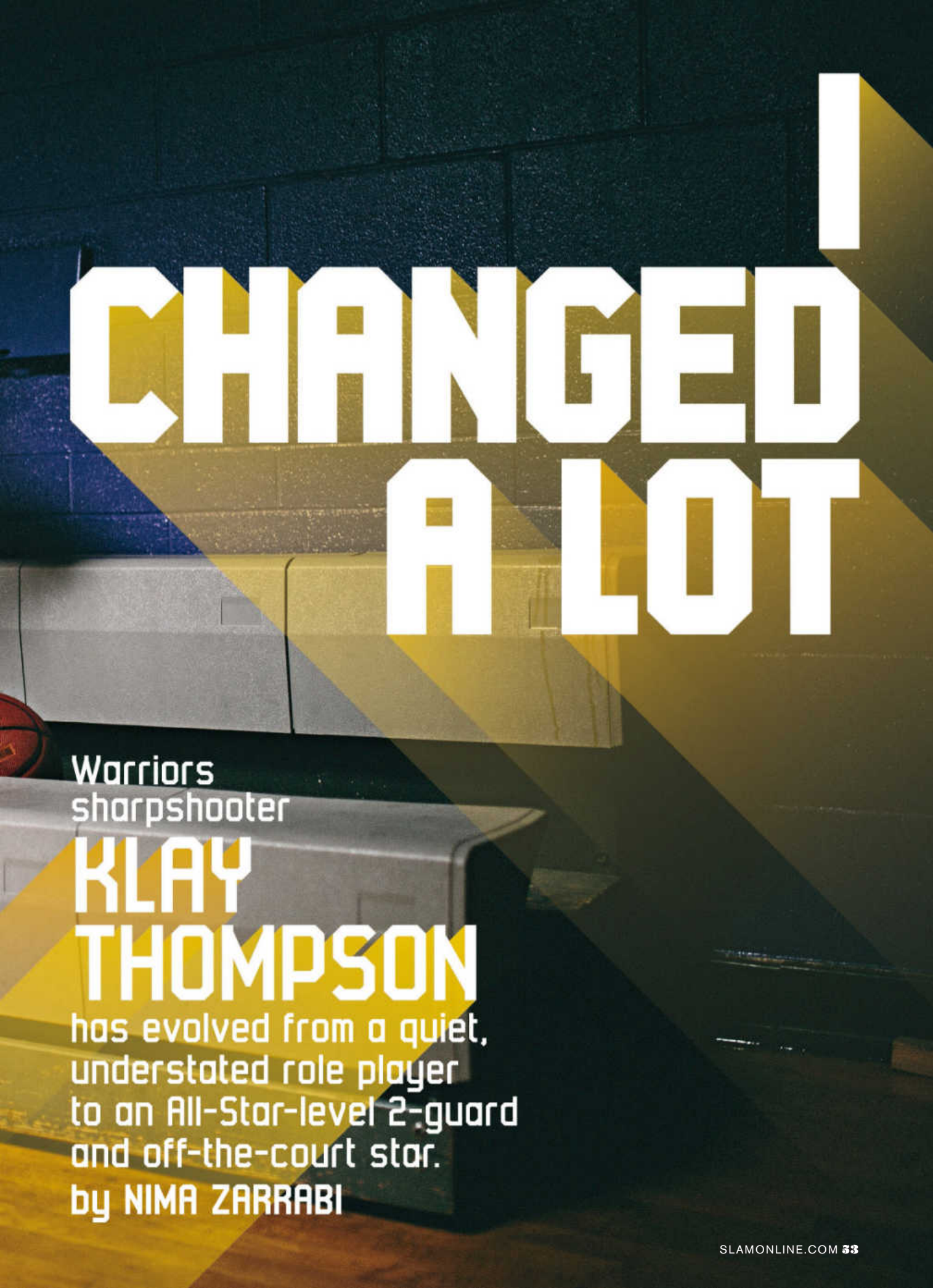


SLAM^{***}UPS

JAMES HARDEN, ROCKETS







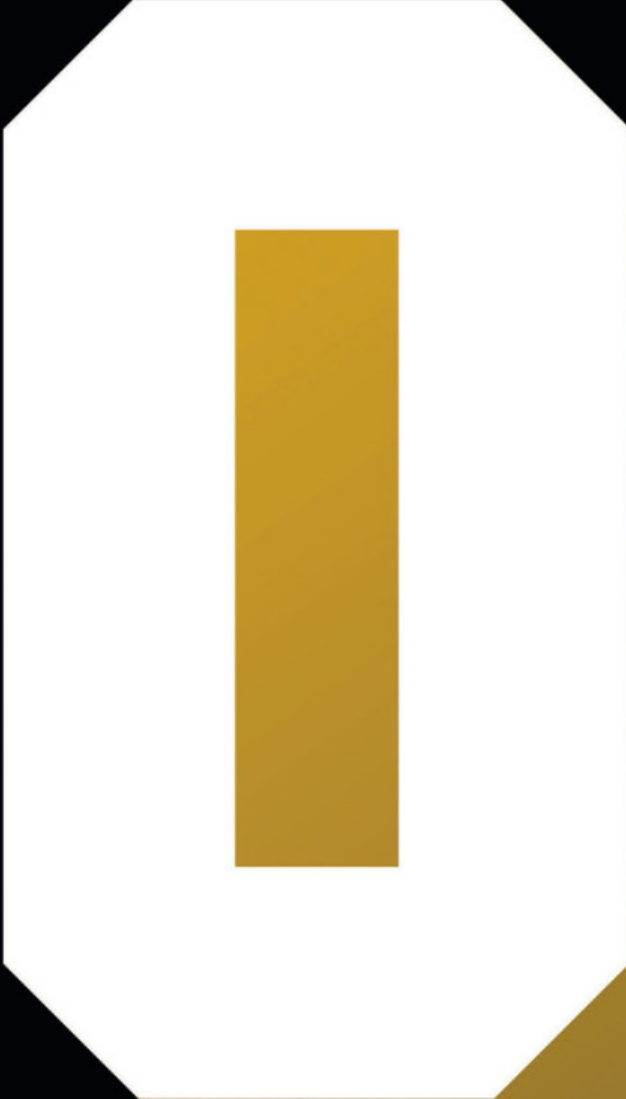
! CHANGED A LOT

Warriors
sharpshooter

**KLAY
THOMPSON**

has evolved from a quiet,
understated role player
to an All-Star-level 2-guard
and off-the-court star.

by NIMA ZARRABI



ON THE NIGHT he snapped for 37 points in one quarter against the Sacramento Kings, Klay Thompson didn't look like himself. He was smiling, jumping up and down, screaming at times on his way to a pristine 13-13 from the floor and 9-9 from behind the arc in the third quarter. The stone-faced, expressionless look he usually exudes on-court had evaporated as he charged toward the NBA record he set that night. He was in the moment and loving it. Some of the evening is still a blur for Thompson, who racked up 52 in all. What he recalls vividly are the Warriors fans on their feet each time he touched the ball and his teammates unwillingness to shoot. "I have to give so much credit to my teammates because they didn't want to shoot the ball until I missed," Thompson says. "I couldn't believe I hit 13 shots in a row—

that's hard to do in practice, let alone a game. I didn't have to take too many dribbles in that sequence—I was able to get to my spots. And the shots I was putting up were all in rhythm. It looked like it came in good flow. It was a crazy night, man. It's hard to even put it in words."

When he has gone back and watched film of that night, Thompson has come away dreaming for more. "For me it's very motivating—man, I can put up 37 in a quarter?" Thompson says. "I know I have a lot of untapped potential after seeing that. I know that if I can do that I can really become a great player. I don't know if I can ever do it again. I don't want to put a limit on myself. It was a special night for me because I never thought in my lifetime I would hold an NBA record."

Not many people who watched Thompson playing

ball while growing up in Orange County, CA, thought he would either.

Standing before the young students of Kipp Charter School in Oakland, Thompson asks about their dislikes. Math is at the top of the list and Thompson understands. Kipp is a national network of free open enrollment college preparatory public schools that are dedicated to serving students in underserved communities for success in college and in life. Their mission is very important to Klay, who believes he was extremely fortunate to grow up with full family support and a top-notch education. His visit to the program in September included a personal donation of \$25,000 to support the cause and the Larry O'Brien trophy as a very nice conversation piece.

"I tell kids that it's OK to have the NBA in the back of your head as a dream but don't think you're going to make it tomorrow," Thompson explains. "I encourage them to play other sports. I played basketball, baseball and football growing up and I learned so much from each sport. I think it can help you become more cerebral. You're not going to know what your real true love is until you're older. I encourage them to try things."

Klay also likes to remind kids about the rough days he has at work.

"It's not that much different than school—we all have bad days," he says. "It took me a long time to become a good player in this League, and I learned that you're going to have your ups and downs. It's about how you respond and that's what I also stress to them."

As a teen, Klay was obsessed with the game of chess, his true love. Some kids are surprised to hear that. "When I was in school my biggest regret was not being involved more in chess," Klay says. "I love chess—it's my favorite thing to play on the planet. I encourage all kids to join the chess club or to play an instrument especially if the school is going to fund it. Try new things as much as possible because you never know what you may fall into and fall in love with."

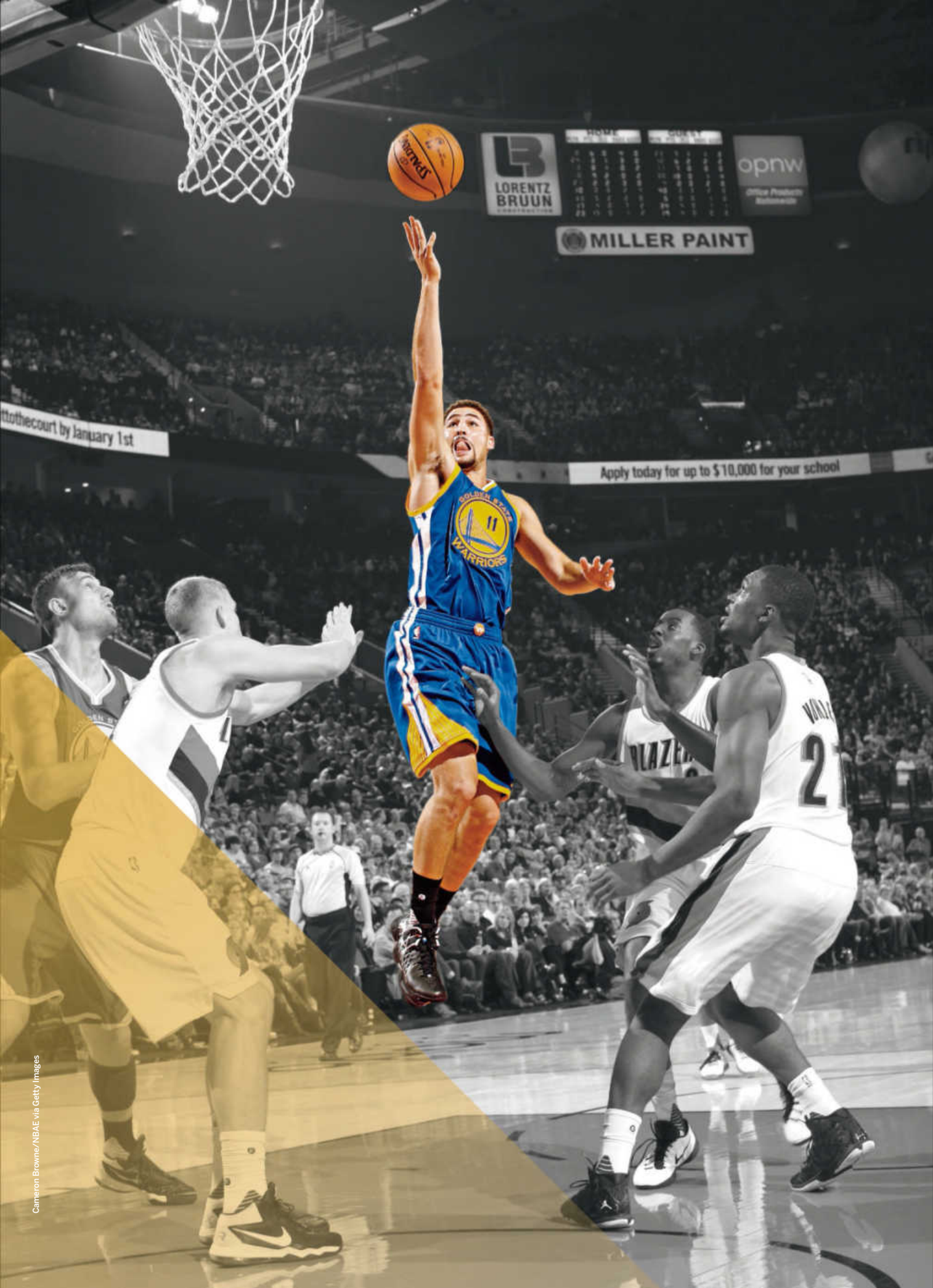
Reflecting back on his days in high school, Klay says the

expectations of being an athlete may have hindered his passion in chess. "In high school it might not be the cool thing to join a band or the chess club; especially as an athlete, you're supposed to be this macho big man on campus type of guy that shouldn't be doing those things," Klay says. "Looking back on it, I wish I would have done more of that. I play chess with [Andre] Iguodala all the time on the plane. I tell kids to never be ashamed about what your passions are or what another kid may say to you because you care about something."

While he was in high school, Washington State University recruited Klay the hardest. Leading up to that point, Thompson excelled in various sports, as a dual-threat QB on the gridiron and a strong-armed pitcher on the diamond. The son of former NBA great Mychal Thompson and former college volleyball standout Julie Thompson, college scouts knew Klay had incredible pedigree and could shoot. As his game and body continued to develop at a rapid pace late in high school, Klay chose WSU for college. Looking back, it was the perfect place for his development.

"Pullman really grew on me—I was able to focus on my game up there and I was coming from L.A. where there's not really a college town," Thompson says. "Pullman is exclusively a college town. I was able to have the true college experience and that was a great time for me."

His trajectory since declaring for the Draft as a junior and being selected by the Warriors in the Lottery has been stunning. As a rookie, he averaged 12.5 ppg and last year in his fourth season, he made his first All-Star team, finished the year with a 21.7 ppg average and was among the top three-point shooters in the League with 239 triples for a .439 percentage. He has also flourished as a defender, locking up guys with a serious commitment to that side of the ball. "I hate getting scored on," Thompson says. "You're going to get scored on in this League playing against the best players in the world. It's just a feeling that I hate. It's a feeling I always had as a kid. As a competitor, it



doesn't sit well with me."

Thompson was a critical piece of the Dubs' run and his emergence as a superstar is clear. But where do we go from here? "We have great competitors on this team and we're not going to be complacent," he says. "I don't want to settle with just being good and having a couple good years and winning one Championship. We're too competitive to let that happen. I feel like there is something special brewing with this team here. We're not satisfied with just doing it once—we know we really have a chance at putting together something special because we have such a young team and great mix of veteran players as well."

Individual and team success have helped establish some new off-court opportunities for Thompson. He has partnered with Stance Socks as the face of their NBA line, a brand he loves. "I'm so excited to be with Stance—we both have a mutual respect for one another," Thompson says. "I've never seen socks this unique with so many different designs. I especially love all the throwback socks with all the old NBA legends on them, those are my favorite. I just got this Pistol Pete pair that are really sweet."

The Stance headquarters in

San Clemente are near where Klay grew up and he has spent considerable time there learning about the company. "I have no idea about designing, but it's something I would love to learn about," Klay says. "I'm going to learn and give my input."

From a fashion standpoint, Thompson describes his style as classic and clean. "I don't pull off anything too flashy, I don't think that's my personality," he says. "As long as it's crisp and looks fresh, I like it. I don't really wear any crazy colors. I love black jeans and black shoes—that's always my go-to."

Thompson has also gone global, partnering with Chinese footwear company ANTA, who has added him to Team Priceless and intends to market the sharpshooter exclusively in China. He has made trips to China to work camps for the brand and has been blown away by the country's passion for the game. "Instead of being another guy with a shoe company, I'm one of ANTA's featured players," Thompson says. "It's such a trip to me that I will actually be in commercials that air in China—it's hard to believe that basketball has taken me that far. It's like a pinch-myself moment every time I go over there. I would go to some events where I was featured on stage and there

"It took me a long time to become a good player in this League, and I learned that you're going to have your **UPS AND DOWNS.** It's about how you respond."

would be 6,000-7,000 people. The only place I might get that turnout is in the Bay—maybe. It's crazy to me."

Klay has also joined the strong team of athletes at BODYARMOR, noting Kobe Bryant's involvement in the company as a major factor. "I like their mindset in the sports drink game," he says. "I've been to a few of their camps and they are really passionate about what they are doing and I think they are going to blow up."

He has rounded out his marketing portfolio with a natural partnership with Shot Tracker, a sleeve that can be worn during workouts to record data on your performance.

Despite his heavy off-court demand, the goal has not changed for Klay. He wants to continue to transcend his game—he's only 25 and knows

there is still plenty of room for growth. He is excited about working with new Warriors assistant coach Steve Nash to add new wrinkles to his arsenal.

"I worked out with him twice when I was in L.A. and learned a lot about what I need to get better at," Thompson says. "We didn't even shoot the ball that much—we did a lot of technical work on things like balance. He's still in great shape and really gave me some great pointers on how to play at a lower level and work on my balance so I can be in a better position to make plays. I know how good he is going to be for me."

Thompson's heard the whispers about teams attempting to mimic the Warriors' style of play. The notion that teams across the League are planning to attempt more threes, play a little more "small ball."

"People seem to think it's easy," says Thompson, who was averaging 15 ppg through the Dubs' first seven games, all easy wins. "To play our style you really need to have five guys on the court that can shoot, pass and dribble. Not a lot of teams have that, you know?"

His growth as a player has coincided with his development as a communicator. Thoughtful and insightful, he has become a media favorite when it comes to snagging a quality quote.

It once seemed as if he despised having to talk.

"Ask anybody on the team, I said very few words here my first year," Thompson says. "I feel a lot more comfortable around the facility and all the guys. Even with Bob Myers and our owners Joe and Peter—it's easier to joke around with those guys being in my fifth year. But they really may have only heard me say 10 words my entire rookie year. It's been a drastic change." **S**



SLAM Presents

STANCE



DWYANE
WADE

CHANDLER
PARSONS

ANDRE
DRUMMOND

ALLEN
IVERSON

NEW
UNDERWEAR

The Time Has Come

As the official on-court sock
of the NBA, **STANCE** is changing
the game from the floor up

CERTIFIED

Against plenty of odds, Stance has become the official sock of the NBA. Here's a look at how it happened.

BY ABE SCHWADRON





Years before Clarke Miyasaki stepped into his current role as Stance's executive vice president of business development, he attended a Utah Jazz game with his friend Jeff Kearn, who would some months later be better known as the brand's CEO and founder. Miyasaki, who previously helped grow Skull Candy headphones, was a hoophead always interested in seeing the game up close. Kearn, a keen entrepreneur, had been looking for the next big thing, and was excited to tell Miyasaki that he'd finally, after considering jewelry and school supplies, settled on the perfect category to challenge in the market: socks.

"He's like, 'Yup, men's hosiery,'" Miyasaki remembers. "I just start laughing at him. I'm like, 'Socks? Wow.'"

Eventually, Kearn convinced him to come aboard, not knowing that Miyasaki all along had his eyes set on getting Stance—at its outset an action sports brand with wavy designs that matched better with Vans than basketball shoes—onto the NBA hardwood.

There was only one problem for Miyasaki's pipe dream: a company called FBF was already producing the NBA's official socks. You know the ones—plain white and plain black, with the NBA logo on either side. For the better part of two decades, those were the joints, no questions asked. "We've had the same sock partner for a long time," the NBA told Stance, in essence. "They're great, we're good."

Undeterred, Miyasaki and Stance focused first instead on securing the license to produce Hardwood Classics products, which led to the wildly successful "NBA Legends" collection. With retail sales of the Legends socks popping off and the brand's performance products getting better behind the scenes, Miyasaki decided it was enough of a foot in the door to revisit the on-court discussion with his connects at the NBA.

"We had this idea to do the Hardwood Classics and Legends, which went so well that I think we gave ourselves a license to ask for the on-court sock. I was doing a normal NBA meeting and I said, 'Hey, I got one more thing for you guys. I wanna take over the on-court sock,'" Miyasaki remembers. "Laughed out of the room is a little strong, but...I was kinda laughed out of the room."

"They were like, 'Oh, your little sock company in San Clemente that's been around for 18-24 months? *Riiiiight*.'"

What happened at the next meeting is now a well-known piece of the brand's folklore. At All-Star Weekend 2014 in New Orleans, Miyasaki handed Lisa Piken Koper, NBA Vice President of Licensing, a million-dollar check, hoping it would prove to the powers that be that Stance was ready to get down, whatever it took. Lo and

behold, it worked. In April 2015, Stance and the NBA announced a multiyear partnership, installing the brand as the League's official on-court sock provider.

"I for sure laugh at it," Miyasaki says of the infamous million-dollar check story, with Stance now a few months into its first season outfitting the L. "Everyone's like, 'Oh, what a gimmick.' It kind of was a gimmick, but at the same time, they had told me no at least three times, maybe more. So I needed something to say we're serious. And looking back, it really did get the NBA to say, 'Damn. These guys are serious—OK.' It put us more on the map of, 'Maybe they could pull this off.' I really believed that we could do it, but it took about, at least a year, year-and-a-half of convincing for them to give us a shot."

Opening night 2015, Stance socks were on players' feet. "We wanted to innovate on-court and knew that Stance would bring a fresh perspective and create top-class, superior products for the NBA and our athletes," says Piken Koper. Oh, and the NBA never cashed that check. Instead, they're framing it.

During All-Star Weekend 2015, Stance gave the players a chance to test out their performance socks for the first time in a competitive NBA environment. Miyasaki and Co. were nervous—not because they doubted their product, but because elite athletes can sometimes be resistant to change. "These guys have been wearing the same socks for a decade or several years and it's hard to switch, right? Whether it's creatures of habit or they like the feel or they're superstitious, or whatever it might be. No matter how much better we think our sock is, or a laboratory says our sock is, or we can say, 'It wicks this percentage better than any other one,' it's different," Miyasaki acknowledges. "A lot of credit to the players for being open-minded and giving it a shot."

Now that Stance has been installed for real, the reaction to the brand-new partnership this season has been prodigiously positive. Jay Gaspar, longtime Head Equipment Manager with the Phoenix Suns, says he was "pleasantly surprised" when he learned Stance had inked a deal to become the League's official on-court sock provider, and that just about every player he's talked to has given the socks two thumbs up.

"It is quite a change," Gaspar admits. "Usually, dealing with the socks in the past, we'd wear a home white and then black on the road, and then you'd plan accordingly. But with Stance, they changed the game. We go with four different socks this year, and we have six different uniforms, so we match up the socks with those uniforms." Not to mention the special socks Stance already had planned for Hoops for Troops, Christmas and other special occasions throughout the year.

Stance's out-of-the-box personality in turn inspired Gaspar to bring an idea to the League and the brand. With Suns legendary PG Steve Nash being inducted to the team's Ring of Honor early in the season, Gaspar dreamt of outfitting the PHX players in a sock adorned with his image—much like the Legends socks Stance had seen success with at retail. With the League's approval, Stance made it happen. Phoenix beat the visiting Blazers, all the while wearing the limited edition Nash socks with pride.

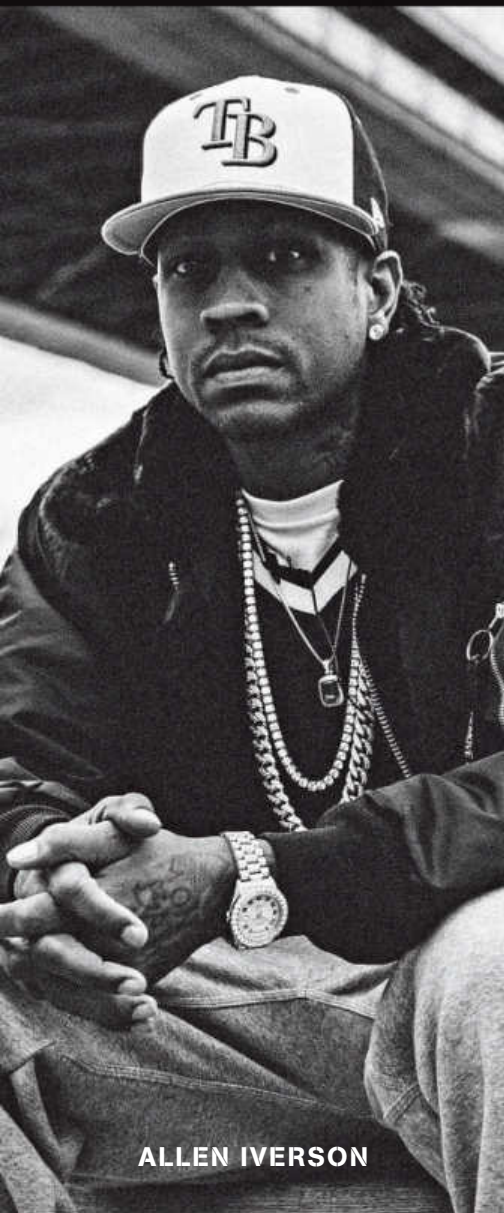
The reaction, from both fans and players, was overwhelming. Miyasaki says he couldn't get away from the tweets, texts and pats on the back that night. "I saw Dirk Nowitzki posted a photo of the sock, congratulating Steve, and I was like, 'Man, all this hype around a sock.' It's just so crazy to me," he says. "I think what it's done is just show me that it's the tip of the iceberg on what we can do at the NBA."

Not even a month into the brand's first season in charge of the League's socks, Stance is making waves at retail and in locker rooms. Perhaps it's because of the company's undying commitment to the game. "With that Nash sock, it just really showed that they're second to none," Gaspar says of working with Stance. "If you have an issue with any of the socks, they'll come out and see you. They want our constant feedback, and we really didn't have that in the past. I really think they're going the extra mile to make sure it's the perfect sock for on and off the court."

For Miyasaki, the feeling is mutual. "It's just cool that the NBA could share the vision with us," he says. "If the first couple of weeks have taught me anything, it's that the sock game might be even cooler than I thought." **S**

"I really believed we could do it, but it took about, at least a year, year-and-a-half of convincing for them to give us a shot." —MIYASAKI

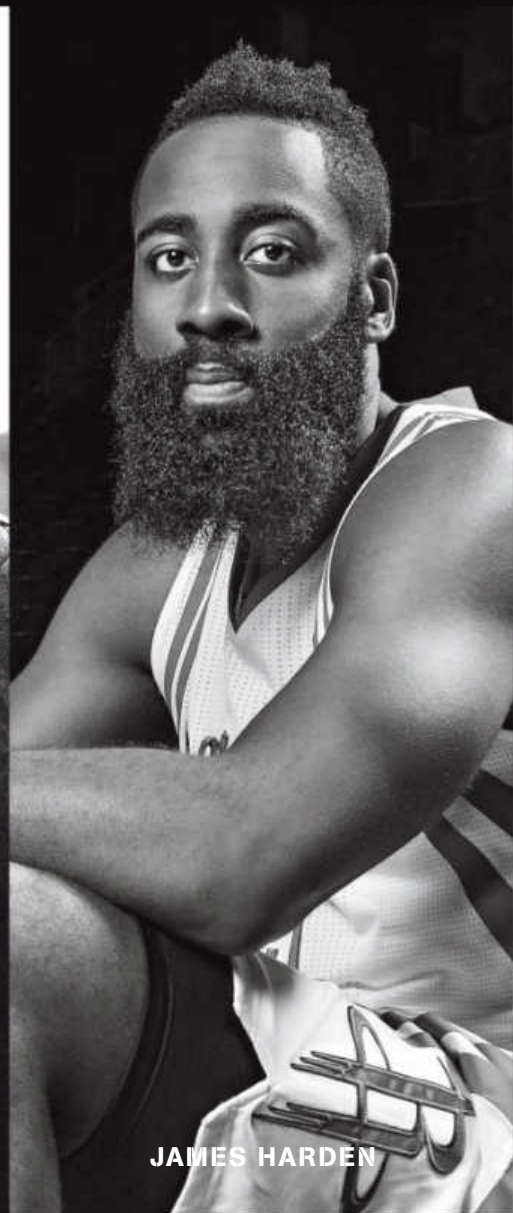




ALLEN IVERSON



ANDRE DRUMMOND



JAMES HARDEN

POWER CIRCLE

Stance assembled an eclectic team of NBAers to rep its up-and-coming brand.

BY ADAM FIGMAN

Starting a basketball team is easy: Get five players and you're good to go. Starting a roster of endorsees for a sock company—not so easy. You need players who can grab attention, who inspire others to act how they act and dress how they dress. This was the challenge Stance faced upon diving into the basketball world, and they've done a pretty damn good job putting a group together.

The sock company chose a solid starting

point: Miami Heat superstar Dwyane Wade has been catching fans' eyes on the court with his uptempo, flashy game and off the court with his slick, classy and, uh, flashy style for years. Wade got down with Stance early and has had his own casual sock line for quite a long time (see pg 66). He's been a member of the Stance team since (almost) as long as the Stance team as a whole has existed, and he's been an integral part of the brand's growth in just about

every sense imaginable.

In 2014, Stance signed Pistons big man Andre Drummond and Mavs swingman Chandler Parsons—the first two NBAers to join the brand's "Punks and Poets," the wide-range of celebrities who rep the company—giving each a line of Stance Fusion performance socks. Marketed as the "Battle of the Birds," both guys were given a bird-inspired line of socks, Parsons' with flamingos (nodding to his Floridian upbringing) and Drummond's with penguins (nodding to his cold-weather New York upbringing and lack of fear).

"I've always thought a great pair of socks finishes an outfit," Parsons says. "I came across Stance and had my agency reach out. I ended up getting the first Stance Hoops signature line, and they are the best socks on the planet."

Next Stance added Golden State Warriors sharpshooter Klay Thompson, an upstart who could in many ways be



DWYANE WADE



KLAY THOMPSON



CHANDLER PARSONS

compared to the sock company itself. Not that long ago, Thompson was, like Stance, simply a young, up-and-coming entity; just a couple years later Thompson has now established himself as a legitimate star in his own right. Klay made the All-Star Game in 2015, averaging 21.7 points and 3.1 threes per game over the course of the season, all while becoming an integral part of the World Champion Warriors—to say nothing of the endorsement deals he signed with sneaker company ANTA, sports drink company BODYARMOR and wearable-tech maker ShotTracker. In the process, Thompson was the face of Stance's NBA on-court launch.

"You have to sign with brands you believe in and are passionate about—that's what makes for a great relationship," Thompson says. "[Stance's] creativity is on another level. They've kind of changed the sock game, and their socks are so comfortable, too. The partnership with the League is

going to be special as well. So just to have them want me gave me a huge confidence boost. I felt like we could build something great because I love to hoop, and every hooper needs good socks. I run and shoot for a living, so I have to take care of my feet."

Every group needs a quality vet, so Stance went out and snatched up a true OG in the world of NBA style—retired Philadelphia 76ers legend Allen Iverson, the man who years ago singlehandedly pushed then-Commissioner David Stern to rewrite the guidelines of how players could dress on the sidelines of NBA tilts. AI will have his own casual sock line next fall, years after he laced up official NBA socks—which he says he loved even before his NBA days. "You get some NBA socks and you aren't in the NBA?" AI laughs. "[Then] you doing something."

Rounding out the group is the brand's most recent NBA signee, 2015-16 MVP candidate and all-around superstar James

Harden. The Beard evolved into full-on luminary over the past year; in 2014-15 he averaged 27.4 ppg, 5.7 rpg and 4.7 apg while leading the Rockets into the Western Conference Finals and utilizing both his sick handles and ever-flowing facial hair to become a marketer's dream (word to his partnerships with adidas, Foot Locker, BBVA, BODYARMOR, New Era KT Tape and others).

It's a solid squad—DWade as the metaphoric coach, AI as the legend, and Parsons, Drummond, Thompson and Harden rounding out the unit.

"We could not be more thrilled with our current group of basketball Punks and Poets," says Stance's Basketball Category Director Tzvi Twersky. "They're all high-caliber players; they're all exceptional people; and they all have personalities and interests that align with our brand. It's been awesome to see the roster quickly evolve from one guy to a team that we'd put up against anybody—on and off the court." **\$**



AYO, TECHNOLOGY

Stance's official NBA socks are outfitted with the best tech the sock world has ever seen.

BY ABE SCHWADRON

Once upon a time, not so long ago, the phrase "performance sock" didn't exist—not even in the NBA. The best hoopers on the planet would simply slip on the same old white cotton socks that your Pops still wears at the gym, then lace up the most technologically advanced kicks known to man on top of them and sprint on the court to play ball. Looking back, it just didn't make much sense.

"The NBA athletes are bigger, they're stronger, they're faster than they've ever been, and the game is more physical. If you look at apparel, a lot of these guys are wearing almost body armor, product with built-in padding for impact. So we're recognizing that and using that same mentality as we approach the sock," says Todd Craig, Senior Director of Innovation at Stance. "We've got to create a product that fits right, that feels good, it wicks moisture and it protects the players. That's the driving force behind the product. We look at it not as a sock, but a piece of equipment. And I think that's different from the NBA's prior sock supplier."

In fact, Stance looked at the existing sock market and found that the best performance socks were actually being made at the collegiate level, where sneaker brands outfit their schools with their premium products. NBA players, on the other hand, were playing in what Craig describes as a "basic" or "core-level" sock. And while they weren't technologically advanced, they were liked by the players, simply for the fact that they were NBA socks.

Craig, who also helped create the brand's new running sock and whose résumé includes a role at Nike's Innovation Kitchen, says the brand's design team knew right away what to focus on when word came down that they'd be making the official NBA sock from scratch. "For us, it's about fit, it's about comfort—that's No. 1. We want these

guys to put this sock on and forget about it. That's the true mark of a great product, if when I put it on, I'm not thinking about it. Because if these guys are thinking about their socks, they get distracted, they're not performing at top level," he says. "The last thing you want is a guy jacking his sock up where the heel is coming out the top of the shoe or something. If these guys are wearing premium performance product but it doesn't fit, they'll notice."

With that in mind, Stance used everything in its power to build the best basketball sock ever. You've got the saw tooth anatomical lateral compression—cushioning placed to match the anatomy of the foot and impact points. There is the Y-shaped seam knitted into the heel for superior fit and the seamless toe closure to prevent abrasions. There is the mesh on top of the foot for thermo-regulation and ventilation. There are the fusion fibers that fight blisters and bacterial growth. After a few in-house wear-tests with the Stance fam, their signed athletes and other pros ("We don't want to see anything with our logo on it that we don't feel good about," Craig insists) the prototype was ready for the NBA hardwood.

Of course, there was room for one more critical detail: the instantly recognizable high ankle padding, designed to keep players' feet from pains caused by other players (think getting kicked en route to the

hoop or diving for a loose ball), the floor or even their own footwear. Unlike its predecessor, the ultra-high loft cushioning in the ankle padding of the official Stance NBA sock stands up to wear and tear. Plus, it stands out.

"The ankle is pretty iconic to us," says Craig. "It was intentional. There's a functional element there, but we did want to make something that was iconic. We wanted to link our brand identity to a functional element, not just an aesthetic."

"Stance, as a brand, we're known for our designs and our style, but as we go into the performance category, the product really has to perform. That's the driving force. It can't just be the form, it's got to be the function first," he continues. "For us as a brand, when function and form collide—that fusion—that's what our brand is about. So really it's creating the functional element to be the best basketball sock in the world."

One aesthetic that will remain forever is the legendary Jerry West NBA logo, now prominently flanked by Stance's logo and in many cases, the individual NBA team logo, too. But while the socks have a distinctive look that's already resonating with players and consumers alike, Craig maintains that for the pros, the goal is simple: "If these guys put this sock on and forget they're wearing it, that's utopia for us. That means we did our job right." ■

"For us as a brand, when function and form collide—that fusion—that's what our brand is about." —CRAIG



FASHIONABLY EARLY

Dwyane Wade is the undisputed forefather of the style movement that has taken control of the NBA.

BY ADAM FIGMAN

It's hard to pinpoint the exact moment it happened, but at some point during the late '00s, years after David Stern instated an NBA dress code and years before the bowels of arenas evolved into pro-athlete runways, Dwyane Wade established himself as the undeniable leader of the style movement that's dominated the League through the past half-dozen or so years.

If you had to zero in on a time, though, you could do worse than the '08-09 season, specifically All-Star Weekend of '09, when he sported a bow tie above a yellow cardigan on Friday night, then red-rimmed glasses on Saturday. These outlandish outfits, as it turned out, weren't some random coincidence—at the time, Wade's Miami Heat were painfully average (with a 28-24 record in an Eastern Conference that was strong up top but lacked any depth whatsoever), and the bright fashion choices were made simply to avert attention from that reality.

"I started working with a stylist at a time when I was just coming back from surgeries and the Heat was having the worst season," Wade says. "She presented the idea of using my personal style to distract the media from the terrible record we had going into All-Star 2009. I loved the idea of being able to express myself through my fashion while still [complying with the] dress code."

Since then, we've seen all sorts of sartorial statements from the Miami guard: flip-up sunglasses, skin-tight pants, a Versace jumpsuit with a v-neck open down into his abs. "#Ifyoucantpullitoffyouwont-understandit," he hashtagged the Instagram post containing that much-parodied v-neck 'fit. Most can't, and so most didn't.

Fact is, whether it was a personal decision to target the pages of *Vogue* and *Esquire* or just a stylist with an idea aimed to turn eyes away from a subpar basketball team, Wade has led the charge of athletes who focus equally on playing their best as they do looking their best.

The aforementioned stylist who pushed Wade into this realm is Calyann Barnett. Barnett began as a stylist for musical artists,

then realizing that NBA athletes are superstars in their own right. She started working with Wade in late 2006, originally planning looks for him, until years later, when the 11-time All-Star became legitimately interested in style, transforming their relationship into a collaboration.

"Dwyane understands that his brand is bigger than basketball," Barnett says. "When the season ends, the real work starts to maintain the brand. He also knows that the most important article you can put on is confidence."

"We realized [Wade] was setting trends when his wardrobe was making headlines—good and bad," says Lisa Joseph, Wade's business manager. "The pink pants, the Versace jacket—there's been some classics."

In 2011, Wade visited Milan and Paris for Fashion Week, and from there, it was official: Dwyane Wade was the international face of NBA style. He sat front row at a Versace show—"It was like sitting courtside at a game," he says. "It was like the fashion playoffs!"—and the fact that he could make a real dent in this new world truly clicked. If All-Star 2009 was the unofficial beginning of the movement, Milan Fashion Week '11 was when the concept of athletes having a secure place in the fashion industry evolved from cute trend to statement of fact.

Nowadays, Russell Westbrook's shirts regularly become trending topics, Stephen Curry is the face of *EXPRESS* and LeBron James seems to own a second home in the pages of *GQ*. But it was undoubtedly Wade who cleared the path—runway, if you will—

that so many NBAers currently strut on.

"It feels awesome to know I was the catalyst for changing the face of NBA fashion and ultimately how marketing dollars are allocated to athletes," Wade says. "Big fashion houses are now looking to the athlete to collaborate with."

As are sock brands.

Always a colorful sock wearer, Wade was approached by Stance years ago to get involved with the company and design his own line. He accepted, though the first few months together were not without hiccups. "I vetoed the first designs because they were all stripes," Wade declares. "I wanted socks that made a statement."

Wade was the first NBA player the brand signed and his lines have sold very well over the last few years. He's very involved with the design of his line, evidenced by the mood boards he and Barnett send to the brand's creatives every season. As of press time, 34 different styles are available in the "Dwyane Wade" section of stance.com. And he says a luxury dress sock is up next. Stance has since added Chandler Parsons, Andre Drummond, Klay Thompson, James Harden and Allen Iverson to their roster.

"My sock line has been extremely successful because it's a true expression and everyone from 10-year-old kids to 60-year-old surgeons..." he says. Wait. What? "True story, a friend of mine sends me pictures of her dad and all his 60-year-old surgeon friends wearing my socks."

Maybe Father Time can be defeated after all. **\$**

"It feels awesome to know I was the catalyst for changing the face of NBA fashion."

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Following the company's domination of the sock world, Stance's takeover of the men's underwear category has begun.



Socks were just the beginning for the people at Stance. A remix of the underwear drawer was long overdue and luckily the company that has spent the past couple years helping make our feet feel incredible has answered the call.

Despite dozens of companies crowding the lane, the market has been clamoring for their presence—several upstart brands in the retail space have been self-proclaiming their product as the “Stance of underwear” for quite some time. From the outside, men’s underwear seems like a natural progression for Stance, but the category is a completely different environment to break into, as numerous established brands have already anchored heavy terrain in the market. Finding the proper time to develop, design and execute the category was challenging for the brand as well—their full attention has been dialed in on their numerous initiatives and product opportu-

nities in socks.

When a fabric developed inside the company’s innovative SHRED lab was deemed too soft and supple for socks, the brand had the industry game-changer it was looking for, convinced they had invented the perfect “buttery blend” to cobble premium men’s boxer briefs and boxer shorts. The fabric was developed

using extracted milk proteins—it is unlike anything else in the market and will revolutionize the industry, according to Stance co-founder and Chief Product Officer Taylor Schupe.

“The butter blend fabric, the wholester, the coreflex waistband, our feather seam panel construction and beautiful designs are all points of difference in this market,” he says. In addition to the unique fabric offering, Stance will continue its quest for top-notch design and creativity—their DNA. “There is more real estate in underwear so we have an even bigger canvas to try unique, creative concepts,” Schupe says.

Stance plans to infuse the visionary personality of their brand into the category all while paying close attention to packaging, storytelling and marketing. After product testing a few pairs of the Stance line during a week in November, we believe in the ease and quality they provide. Critical point: the underwear stays in place without feeling like spandex, meaning it doesn’t ride and is a complement to modern wear—this is a much better look and feel in today’s tighter fitted denim, pants and shorts. The designs are super fresh and the elastic waistband is on some next level comfort, which is also very important. The price point for the Stance Underwear line will range from \$28-\$36—I expect them to last longer and look better than anything else I currently have folded up in my drawer right now.

“The target consumer for us is anyone who wants to look good and feel incredible,” Schupe says. “We want Stance to become synonymous with first-layer knit-wear. That includes socks and intimates. Once you try this Butter Blend, you’ll agree that we definitely have a chance to take a large amount of market share.”

Sold.—NIMA ZARRABI

“The target consumer for us is anyone who wants to look good and feel incredible.” —SCHUPE

TRUE LEGEND

With an aptly named line dedicated to the greats of the game, Stance is appealing to old-school fans as well as new-school ones.



Before they had the license for on-court NBA socks or modern-day NBA logos, the folks at Stance were making their mark on hoop fans with their Legends line, which featured (and continues to feature) action photos of past greats such as Larry Bird, Wilt Chamberlain and Julius Erving. The relatively simple design of the socks was a hit in the SLAMDome and at stores nationwide, but now Stance is updating things.

"The original Legend and Hardwood Classic socks were a huge success for the brand. The socks sold exceedingly well, but more than that, they opened a lot of new eyes to Stance," explains Clarke Miyasaki, executive vice president of Business Development at Stance. "We were the first ones to sublimate NBA images onto socks. Since that time, a lot of people have tried their hand at it. It's time for us to up the game again."

One update is in the form of the Trading Card line, and the other is the Ink Splatter line, which work action images of past NBA greats into a much more aggressive design. There are also caricature socks that emphasize certain players' hairstyles (ie, Allen Iverson's cornrows and Bird's blonde mop). "Ink Splatter and Trading Card are our newest designs. The trading cards were definitely inspired by 1980s and 1990s trading cards and both of them are inspired

by our love for basketball, design and history," says Tzvi Twersky, basketball category director for Stance. "A while ago, we gave our designers the task of coming back to us with something new, innovative and original. Weeks later, they came back to us with this incredible line of socks. Almost immediately, we knew that they were ready for our consumers."

Besides consumers and #SLAMFam, obvious potential fans of the Legends socks are the great players who have appeared on them. "Reactions to the socks have run the gamut, from nonchalant to, 'Yo! Send me 100 pairs for my family!'" explains Twersky with a laugh. "It's pretty cool, though, when you hand a player a pair for the first time. It probably compares to showing a guy the cover of SLAM when he's on it. There's a sense of 'I made it!' mixed with 'What took you guys so long?!'" —**BEN OSBORNE**

CASUAL GAME

Stance's lifestyle socks pay homage to everything from pop culture mainstays to world-renowned musical artists...and we love them.



In the sneaker world, UNDS is a term used to describe pulling deadstock sneakers from the box and tissue paper and rocking them for the first time. UNDS-ing a pair of kicks can be a euphoric feeling for sneakerheads—some will plan a future date to showcase their favorite pair. I never thought I'd have this same feeling toward any other piece of clothing or accessories until I bought my very first pair of Stance socks.

The brand's styles, colorways and unique

collaborations have had me prepping my 'fit like never before—the sock is a critical piece of getting it right. Stance has delivered on a different variety of styles and patterns to suit nearly every occasion, but what really sets the brand apart is vibrant artistic design and inspirational collaborations. Pop culture is a way of life when it comes to Stance's lifestyle division, featuring collections from MTV legends Beavis and Butt-head, iconic motorcycle



brand Harley Davidson, photographer 13th Witness and Comedy Central cult favorite TV show, *Workaholics*—a little bit of something for everybody.

The Anthem Legends socks truly stand out for me—unbelievable pieces curated to pay homage to Muhammad Ali and The Notorious B.I.G. Stance has also partnered with artists Big Sean, Nikki Lane and Action Bronson to create one-of-a-kind socks inspired by their music. Stance's core ethos is rooted in the action sports world—skateboarding legends like Christian Hosoi, Steve Caballero and John Lucero are some of the brand's skate legends. Every Stance sock is truly unique and I've found myself routinely surfing their website for the latest releases and collabs. I've even had to double and triple-up on a few styles—the fear that my favorites will sell out and not restock.

Damn, we may need some Stance retro releases soon. —**NZ**

NBA ON-COURT

STANCE 



Heat Logo



Knicks Logo



Magic Core



Nuggets Core



Blazers Core



Hornets Logo



Thunder Logo



Bucks Logo



76ers Core

STANCE 

HOOPS CASUALS



Dwyane Wade
Gatsby Orange \$14



NBA Casual
Timberwolves Logo \$16



Dwyane Wade
Bellot \$14



Legends
Dominique Wilkins Cartoon \$20



Dwyane Wade
Nights \$16



Hardwood Classics
Vancouver Grizzlies \$14



Dwyane Wade
Bora \$14



Hardwood Classics
Toronto Raptors \$14



Dwyane Wade
Prince \$16

THE

Anatomy

OF AN
NBA SOCK



#STANCEHOOPS

ANKLE PADDING

Ultra-high loft cushioning to protect your ankles from wear and tear

SEAMLESS INTEGRATED MESH

Knitted mesh improves ventilation, thermo-regulation and forefoot comfort.

SAW TOOTH ANATOMICAL LATERAL COMPRESSION

Cushioning where you need it, not where you don't, with cooling air channels and a traction design that allows you to make cleaner cuts in your footwork.

Y-GORE SEAM

A Y-shaped seam is knitted into the heel cup to provide you with a perfect fit.

JONES PAD

We added extra-dense cushioning to protect your feet from the sheer forces involved in high-performance play.

SEAMLESS TOE CLOSURE

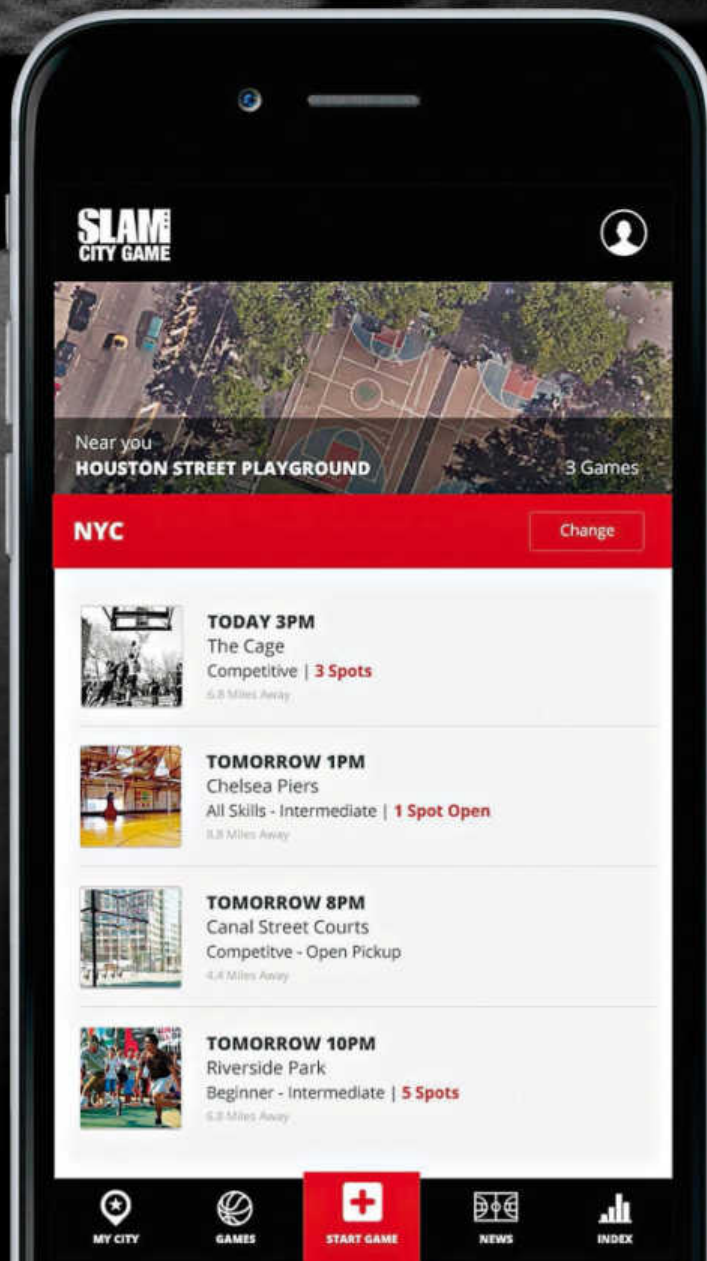
The toe box is linked stitch-by-stitch to ensure a flat look and an abrasion-free experience.



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MY NAME HOLDS WEIGHT

Lafayette "Fat" Lever

spent 11 solid seasons in the NBA,
highlighted by a starring role on
the exciting late-'80s Denver Nuggets.

by DONNELL SUGGS



Brian Drake/NBAE via Getty Images



A MAN CAN wear many hats, but it takes a special gift to be able to thrive in so many lanes simultaneously. Take, for example, the triple-double statistic. One has to reach double figures in three separate (positive) statistics in a game. Fat Lever was that gifted of a ballplayer during his 11-year NBA career. Only Larry Bird (59), Wilt Chamberlain (78), Jason Kidd (107), Magic Johnson (138) and Oscar Robertson (181), respectively, have more career triple-doubles than Lever's total of 44. Despite that list being loaded with Hall of Fame players (Kidd is universally considered a first-ballot inductee once he becomes eligible in 2017), Lever was never one to follow the lime-light, fame and publicity during his collegiate and professional career. A man of that many talents rarely has to.

"I knew Fat was special the first time I saw him play," says former college teammate and 16-year NBA vet center Alton Lister.

Born and raised in Pine Bluff, AR, Lafayette Lever, his mother and two brothers left home to start anew thousands of miles away in Tucson, AZ. His mother and oldest brother Anthony made the move initially before Lafayette and younger brother Elmore followed. Work was hard to come by in Pine Bluff in the early '70s, so a change of venue was necessary. Lever, a quiet

kid, was 11 when he first laid eyes on the desert, and he took his time adjusting, even then the patient playmaker. Basketball came naturally to the young man nicknamed "Fat" due to his younger brother's inability as a baby to pronounce his given name of Lafayette.

"My younger brother Elmore couldn't say 'Lafayette' so he called me 'Fett,' which later became 'Fat,'" Lever says.

Having loved the game from an early age, Lever didn't stop working on it despite his new environment. When the time came to choose a high school, nearby Pueblo High [now named Pueblo Magnet High] on South 12th Avenue was an easy choice. From the start of his playing career, Lever was counted on to do more than just bring the ball down the floor and distribute. Before long he was a 6-3 point guard—a starter his sophomore year—with plenty of college options. Fond of Arizona but looking to branch out, Lever felt it necessary to turn down hometown University of Arizona—not yet the powerhouse it would become in later years—and stay loyal to the state, choosing to play at rival Arizona State, 111 miles away in Tempe.

"When the time came, I felt like I needed to go away and grow up and get out of Tucson," Lever says during an afternoon break from his construction



business in Phoenix. "Far enough to grow up, but close enough to get home in an emergency."

Lister knew ASU was getting a special player before the PG suited up. "I saw Fat play in the Arizona State high school basketball championship game [held on ASU's campus] when he was at Pueblo," Lister says. "When it was time for Lever to visit campus, I made sure that I spent extra time and talked with him."

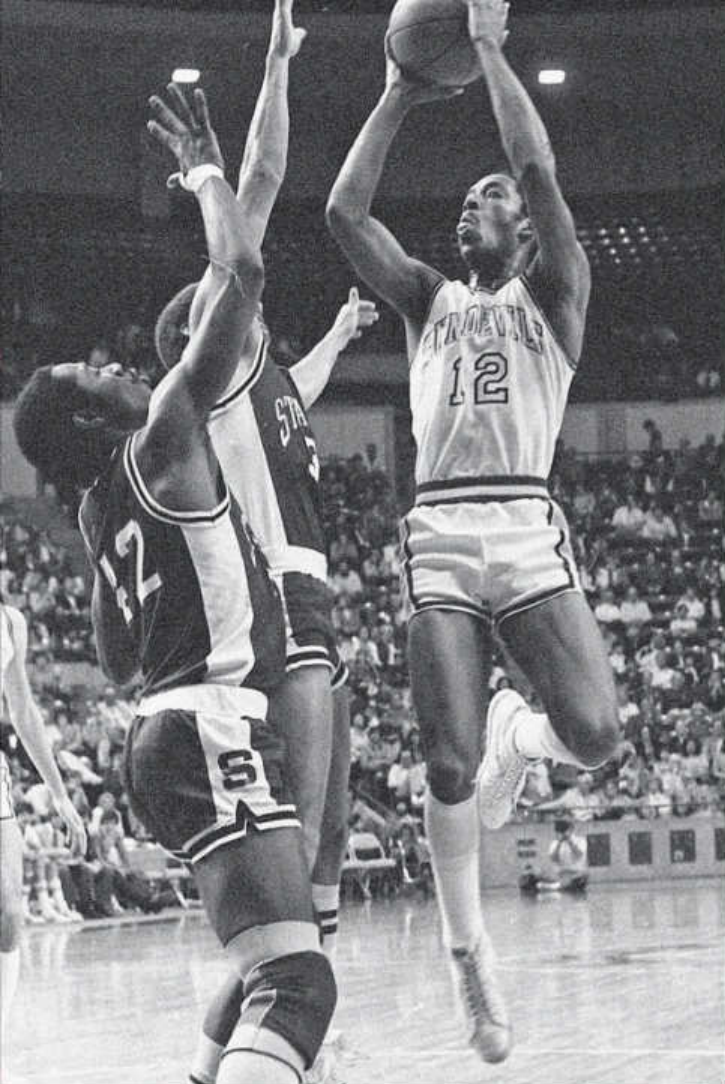
Following a solid freshman season Lever had the opportunity to try out for the 1979 United States U19 World Championships team in Colorado Springs, CO, with future professionals like James Worthy, Mark Aguirre, Fred Roberts, long-time University of Washington coach Lorenzo Romar—then a Husky guard—and North Carolina point guard and Worthy's teammate Jimmy Black. "I remember going to the Sports Festival in Colorado Springs and working out with the guys and realizing that I could really play," Lever recalls.

Nothing fosters success, particularly for a point guard, like

having a talented squad to run with, and the 1981 Arizona State Sun Devils were indeed a team to reckon with in the Pac-10. "That was probably one of the first groups of guys I had ever been a part of that was overly talented but didn't know how to put it all together as a team," says Lever.

The Sun Devils were going into Lever's sophomore year with senior center and future NBA first round Draft pick Lister and a future three-time NBA Champion at shooting guard in incoming freshman Byron Scott. Arizona State's coach Ned Wulk and his staff had been recruiting talent from all over the West Coast (with the exception of some top-notch players throughout the years: we see you James Harden, Ike Diogu, Eddie House and Lionel Hollins).

The team looked tough from the jump. "Byron [Scott] came in my sophomore year and he was the best athlete I've ever seen come through at ASU," Lever says of the current Lakers' coach. "He ran faster, jumped higher and was a very gifted athlete."



“He was the most non-flashy guy I had ever played with, but he was the most fundamentally sound.”

—BYRON SCOTT

“That first day at practice when the coaches assembled us and I saw the talent we had, I knew we had something special,” he continues. “We had an NBA-caliber team in college.”

Along with Lister, a senior, Scott, a sophomore and Lever, a junior, that Sun Devils squad would also have 6-8 senior forward Sam Williams drafted into the NBA. The goal was to dominate the Pac-10, then head to the NCAA Tournament. The first half of that mission was clearly accomplished with a 16-2 conference record, and an overall record of 24-4. Arizona State barely lost three regular-season games—then they were blown out by Kansas in the round of 32. The game had suspiciously been held in Wichita despite Arizona State being a high seed. “That place was packed to the rafters,” says Lister. “I thought we had the horses to get it done, but once we fell behind and with the entire gym on their side, we were done.”

Scott still feels a sense of loss in regards to that night. “That was a tough loss for us,” he says

after a recent Lakers practice. “We had a great team and we expected to get to the Final Four or Elite 8, so to lose in the second round was very disappointing.”

“I definitely believe Fat and I were the best backcourt in the nation,” he adds. “We didn’t get the recognition we felt we deserved, but if you go back and look at where we both ended up, I think obviously we were one of the best, if not the best, combos.”

After a less-successful senior season but some good pre-Draft workouts, the quiet kid from Arkansas walked into the NBA as the No. 11 pick, having been chosen by the Portland Trail Blazers and their legendary coach Dr. Jack Ramsay. Lever started on and off his first two years, learning in the process. “Portland was probably the best place I could go as a rookie because of Dr. Jack and the way he taught the game,” says Lever. “He was a great teacher of the game.”

Two seasons into his career, Lever was blindsided by a trade to Denver and was not happy about it. “I loved the city of

Portland and I enjoyed playing on that team,” says Lever. “We had a second unit with Clyde Drexler and myself that more times than not beat the starters in practice.”

Veteran Blazers Wayne Cooper and Calvin Natt were his NBA tutors during his first years, and though unhappy with the move to the Nuggets, he was pleased to learn that they’d be going with him. “I was surprised I was a throw-in along with Calvin and Wayne,” says Lever. “When we were traded I didn’t know what to expect so I just followed them and did what they said.”

Those six seasons as a Nugget would define Lever’s career. In that first season with old teammates Natt and Cooper, and new teammates Alex English, Bill Hanzlik and Danny Schayes, the Nuggets finished the ’84-85 season 52-30, winning the Midwest Conference and beating San Antonio and Utah en route to a Western Conference finals matchup with the Lakers and Lever’s old college teammate, Byron Scott. “That was the best basketball experience of my pro career,” Lever gushes about going head-to-head with Magic, Worthy and the rest of the Showtime Lakers. “Being a young player on a good team playing the stars of the NBA was priceless.”

The Lakers beat the upstart Nuggets in five games and then the Boston Celtics in an epic six-game series to win the ’85 Championship. Scott stood out throughout that postseason, remembering all the while what he learned as a collegiate teammate of Lever’s. “The thing I learned from playing with Fat was that you didn’t have to be flashy to be productive,” says Scott. “He was the most non-flashy guy I had ever played with, but he was the most fundamentally sound. That’s why he went on to have

such a great career in the NBA.”

Lever’s successful six-season stint in Denver (which included two All-Star selections) ended with another surprising multi-player trade, this time to Dallas. “That was a surprise trade. Whenever you’re playing well there are always trade rumors,” Lever says. “I was on a trip to Hawaii with the Players Association when I heard about it.”

The Mavs team he went to looked amazing, at least on paper. “The expectations in Dallas were higher than in Denver,” Lever says. “We had Alex English [traded with Lever from Denver—Ed.], Derek Harper, Rolando Blackman, Roy Tarpley, Rodney McCray and James Donaldson. That was probably the most talented squad I’ve been around.”

Talent aside, the Mavericks would bottom out due to injuries to Tarpley and Lever and finish the ’90-91 season 28-54. Further hampered by injury, Lever ultimately retired at age 33 following the ’93-94 season. “It was just the wear and tear on my knees,” he says. “When it’s more work getting on the court than it is playing on the court, it’s time to do something different.”

That “something different” would include assisting Lister’s Mesa Community College hoops squad with workouts, to opening the aforementioned construction business, to working for the Kings as their Director of Player Development and color analyst, positions he held for seven years up until the end of last season.

The man with many hats is still a ball of energy, always looking to branch out to new endeavors. “I’m trying to figure out what I want to do when I grow up,” Lever, now 55, says with a chuckle.

Says here he’ll be good at whatever that is. **\$**

THE FAN

CHECK OUT HOW PEOPLE
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WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

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Fashion trends come and go, but one thing that will never go out of style is supporting your squad. And with 10 squads hitting the court on Christmas Day, chances are, one of your favorites will be out there. Either way, these dope new **adidas Christmas Day Swingman Jerseys** are cool enough to cop. Amongst other flourishes, we love the retro script on the front and the wax seal NBA logo on the back. Get your holiday spirit on and grab one or two today. **IMAGE** TOM MEDVEDICH



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KICKS EXTRA SMOOVE HUSTLE

CLIPPERS FORWARD JOSH SMITH HAS BEEN ADDED TO BRANDBLACK'S BUDDING ROSTER OF ATHLETES.

Among the adjectives that describe the vibe Brandblack brings to the court, *smooth* might be the most fitting. Which is why the brand's most recent addition makes so much sense.

Clippers forward Josh Smith, better known as J-Smoove, officially signed a multi-year endorsement deal with Brandblack starting this season.

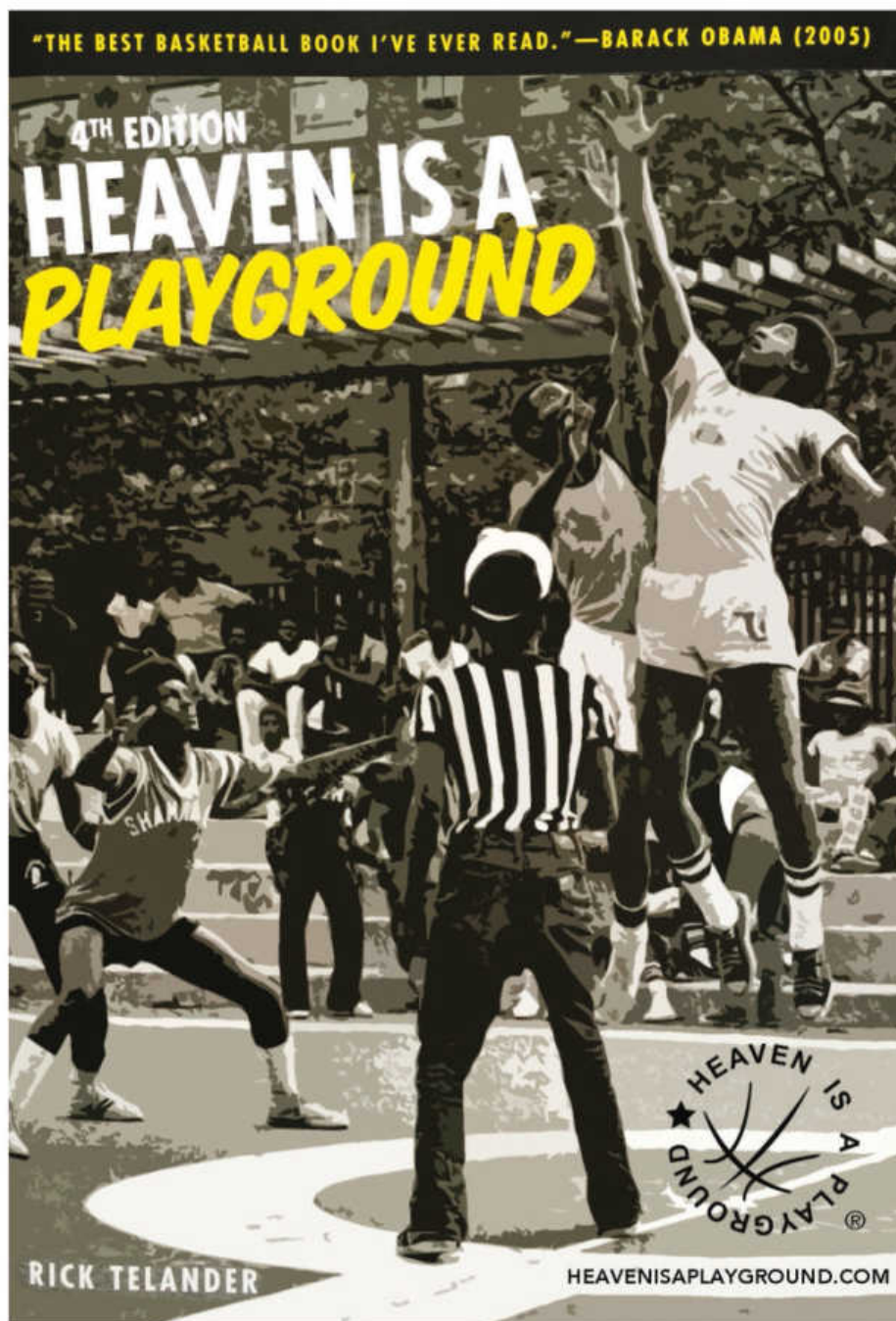
Smith first got wind of Brandblack from former Hawks teammate and current Lob City super-sub Jamal Crawford. Intrigued by J-Crossover's kicks, he inquired within. Soon thereafter, Smoove put ink to paper. Now he's bringing his on-court charisma and off-court fashion sense to Brandblack's growing vision.

"When we spoke to Josh, it was apparent that he has the same mantra of 'look good winning,'" says David Raysse, Brandblack's Founder and Lead Footwear Designer. "He said he always wanted to be different from the crowd, try new things or wear something different, so it only made sense to sign with the new guys in basketball doing things our own way."

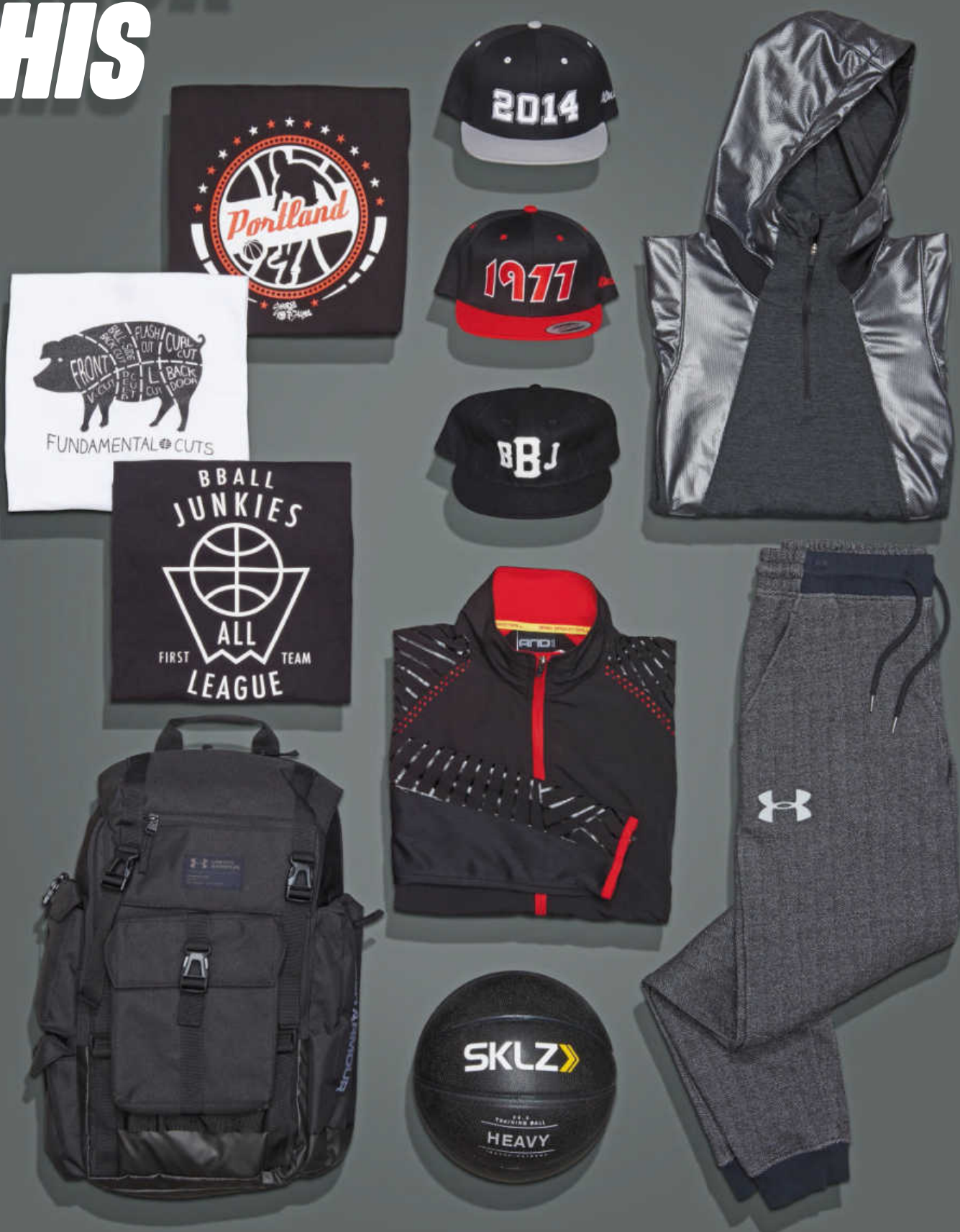
A longtime adidas endorser, Smith admits it took some convincing to leave the Three Stripes for a startup sneaker outfit. "I was so comfortable with adidas. I've worn them since high school, so you're always kind of skeptical when trying new things and getting out of your comfort zone with any kind of shoe company," J-Smoove says, which meant that whatever brand he signed with next "had to be a fit with my comfort, and how it would feel on your foot, and how it would look."

Right away, he says Brandblack passed the test. Smoove's sneaker of choice so far this season is the Force Vector, both in mesh and an all-premium Nappa Leather—it's a performance sneaker that features high-end materials unlike any other on the NBA hardwood right now.

Along with Smith, Brandblack recently announced they'd signed NFL superstar DeSean Jackson, expanding its budding roster. "They're laying down the blueprint," Smith says, "and it's good to be one of the first athletes joining this brand." —**ABE SCHWADRON**



CHECK THIS



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The best gifts for the baller in your life.

Images **Tom Medvedich**



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: **adidas Black Ice Pant** \$75, at adidas.com **adidas Originals Jams Blocked Crew Sweatshirt** \$110, at adidas.com **Mitchell & Ness Bulls Silver Metallic Crew** \$60, at mitchellandness.com **Sneakerbox Monthly Subscription** \$35/month, at sneakerboxco.com **adidas Originals Superstar Tweed Jacket** \$135, at adidas.com **adidas Originals Energy Running Backpack** \$120, at adidas.com **Mitchell & Ness Bulls Big Man Hi Five Pom Beanie** \$24, at mitchellandness.com **Chicago Bulls Special Edition Synchros** \$300 **Headphones** \$150, at nbastore.com **Wilson X Connected Basketball** \$200, at wilson.com/x **Mitchell & Ness Bulls Plaid Snapback** \$30, at mitchellandness.com



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: **Converse CONS Packable Down Jacket** \$200, at converse.com **Limited Edition Stephen Curry Golden State Warriors Autographed Basketball with Multiple Inscriptions** \$1,500, at sportsmemorabilia.com **Nike Pro Hyperwarm Lines Compression Men's Tights** \$60, at nike.com **Mr. Throwback x Chalk Line Jacket** \$150, at mrthrowback.com **Stance Chamber Underwear** \$36, at stance.com **Almanac Brand RARE Jordan Tee** \$30, at thealmanacbrand.com **adidas Dame Fly Guy Tee** \$35, at adidas.com **AND1 Knit Hat** \$20, at and1.com **PSD Money Diamond Underwear** \$20, at Champs, FootAction, Shoe Palace and Sports Zone



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: Under Armour Run Windstopper 1/4 Zip \$180, at ua.com Jordan AJ Shirt \$65, at jordan.com Reebok Classics Jogger \$50, at reebok.com Reebok Reflective Basketball Short \$28, at reebok.com BBALL JUNKIES Icon Hoodie \$65, at bballjunkies.com Spalding Official NBA Game Ball \$140, at dickssportinggoods.com adidas D Rose Tank \$30 and D Rose Squad Short \$50, at adidas.com Jordan Jumpman Top Loader \$110, at jordan.com Jerz Apparel Champs Snapback \$40, at shop.jerzapparel.com adidas Hero Ball Short Sleeve Hoodie \$70, at adidas.com Sole Pack SP-1 DigiCamo \$40, at thesolepack.com and richmondhood.com

PUNKS

HUNTING SEASON

WHEN HE'S NOT STUDYING ANIMALS, **MALIK MONK** IS PATIENTLY TAKING HIS PROMISING BASKETBALL CAREER ONE STEP AT A TIME.

WORDS **FRANKLYN CALLE** ★ PORTRAITS **LAYNE MURDOCH**

Barely 24 hours after a college coach stopped by to reiterate his recruitment pitch, basketball questions led to a conversation about animals and hunting just minutes after Malik Monk wraps up practice on this early November evening.

"I grew up in the country, so when all of my friends went hunting I just wanted to kick it with them," says Monk, who grew up in the small Arkansas town of Lepanto, which counts fewer than 2,000 residents, before relocating to the relatively larger city of Bentonville the summer before his sophomore year. "The first time I shot a gun I was like 9 or 10. I tried [hunting] a couple of times and then I just liked it."

Yesterday's coach was Kentucky's John Calipari and his trip to Bentonville came just four days after Monk returned home from visiting the University of Arkansas—his fourth and last scheduled official visit on the recruiting trail.

While hooping and hunting don't necessarily share much relation on the surface, in the cut-throat business of recruiting, where coaches travel the country looking to woo quality talent, the concept of the hunter and hunttee do correlate.

But in the case of the 6-4 top ranked combo guard, the link between animals and basketball has a different origin. His jersey number used to be 35, a nod to Kevin Durant. But then he wanted a number that

was more representative of his personality, and that's where the impact that hunting has had on him becomes apparent.

"I wanted to switch my number to 5 because when God made the earth in seven days, the fifth day was when animals began appearing on earth," says Monk of the number switch last season. "I watch *Animal Planet* a lot and I'm actually really into the way African wildlife animals like cheetahs and hyenas move."

A key skill in hunting is patience, something Monk has applied perfectly to his recruiting outlook. As of press time, there isn't a timetable for his decision, despite having taken all of his visits. And while he officially cut his list to six over the summer, the majority of the

chatter has been down to the Wildcats and the Razorbacks.

Choosing between an in-state school and a national program is tough for anyone. But for Monk, this in-state school also has family roots. His older brother Marcus played wide receiver for the Razorbacks, where he set a still-standing record for single-season TD receptions with 11 in 2006, before being drafted in the seventh round by the Chicago Bears in 2008. Marcus also had a couple of stints with the basketball team, including a 12-point performance in an upset victory against then Blake Griffin-led No. 4 Oklahoma.

"But when it comes to him, my loyalty is with him," says Marcus. "I tell him this is one time when he can be selfish."

Whichever program is fortunate enough to land Monk will get an explosive combo guard who can light up the scoreboard in a hurry. After all, he does hold the record for most points in a single game in the most prestigious summer youth circuit, the Nike EYBL, with 59 in 2014. Last season, he averaged 26.9 points, 6.7 rebounds, 2.7 assists and 1.9 steals as a junior while helping lead the Tigers to their first state championship game appearance in history.

"My brother's been through this whole process, so he's been telling me that whenever you feel ready, just pick," says Malik of the looming decision. "I just have to be patient."

That's what true hunters do. **\$**





than basketball
—Phil Jackson

Every team to
the program,
was made
long ago.
BENTONVILLE
BASKETBALL

*"I watch Animal
Planet a lot and I'm
really into the way
African wildlife animals
like cheetahs
and hyenas move."*

PUNKS

NEW CAT

WENYEN GABRIEL

Wilbraham (MA)

Wilbraham & Monson Academy, 6-9, F

Back in 1996, an unknown kid named Tracy McGrady walked into adidas' ABCD Camp at New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson University and capped off an otherworldly week with a ferocious dunk over James Felton (RIP) that launched him to the top of the recruiting world. Less than a year later, the Raptors drafted him with the No. 9 overall pick.

University of Kentucky commit Wenyen Gabriel has a long way to go before he can be mentioned alongside T-Mac, but his story is off to a similar start.

Gabriel, a 6-9, 210 combo forward from New Hampshire by way of Sudan, entered the summer of 2016 with offers from the University of New Hampshire and Providence. He was an afterthought on major recruiting service websites and a YouTube mixtape of his highlights was nonexistent.

Playing for Mass Rivals on the AAU circuit, Gabriel tore up the adidas Uprising Summer Championships in Las Vegas, and after he averaged 17.4 points, 8.6 boards and 2.3 blocks over eight games, Gabriel went from off-the-radar recruit to the talk of prep basketball. "Going to Vegas was when I really blew up," he says. "After a couple days in Vegas I started picking up a ton of offers and right before the championship, Kentucky offered me. We lost the game but right after [the game] I picked up offers from Duke, Kansas and UNC. That was big time."

Just as he started his senior year, Gabriel announced his decision to become a Wildcat on ESPN. Despite recently blowing up nationally and being courted by the likes of Coach Cal and Coach K, Gabriel, who has five brothers and sisters, believed in himself from day one. "Sometimes I sit back and think: Wow, it really happened," he says. "You always plan on certain things but when they actually come through, it's amazing...I knew this was all going to happen, it was just a matter of time." —PETER WALSH



DUCK TALES

PAYTON PRITCHARD West Linn (OR) High, 6-1, PG

When Payton Pritchard entered high school in the fall of 2012, Oregon had just witnessed a program in its big-school classification win a fourth consecutive state title for the very first time in history when Jesuit High of Portland did so the previous spring.

The 6-1 crafty point guard, though, was enrolling at West Linn High—in the southern suburb of Portland where he resides—which had yet to win a state title at the 6A division. Three years later, the Lions will be looking to put their names in the history books after winning the 6A state crown the past three years by attempting to join Jesuit as the second program in Oregon's big-school classification to ever four-peat.

"Winning the three state championships has been my biggest accomplishment," says the top-50 national prospect. "This third one was special because I played with kids that I grew up with. The first two years I played with kids that were older, which was fine, but this year I finally played with kids I came in with."

And just like when he opted to attend the neighborhood high school three years ago, last season's Gatorade State Player of the Year—who averaged 22.0 points, 5.8 assists, 3.8 rebounds and 2.4 steals as a junior—announced in late August that he'll be staying home for college as well, set to join the Oregon Ducks next fall.

"I wanted to represent for my state," says the one-time Oklahoma commit. "When I visited it just felt like home. I think we can put a great team together and accomplish a lot." —FRANKLYN CALLE



Gabriel: Courtesy of adidas; Pritchard: Ahmed Klink; Chou: USA Basketball; Coffey: Jon Lopez/Nike Basketball; Tatum: Atiba Jefferson



BASKETBALL DIARY JAYSON TATUM

So the season is finally here. Right now we're just in practice mode, getting ready for our first game on December 1. We started practice on November 2. I'm just trying to get in shape, working out in the morning and then practicing after school with my team.

We have pretty much the same guys from last year with just a few add-ons. We've picked up from where we left off last year so practice has been really competitive, and guys have been getting after it. We only have three new players—two sophomores and a junior transfer. We're bringing back the same starting five from last year.

Everybody is familiar with each other and knows their roles. In the end, we all have the same goal in mind—to win a state championship.

I went to Countdown to Craziness at Duke on October 17. That trip was fun! It was my second time being at Duke and the first time since I committed, so this time it was a little different. It felt more relaxed and open.

I was only there for one day. I flew in Saturday morning and then flew out Sunday morning. The fans chanted my name for me to go sit with them in the first 30 seconds that I walked in the gym. They were chanting, "Jayson Tatum, sit with us!"

I had a chance to see the guys and hang out with the coaches again. It just felt like I was at home. It felt like I was already one of the guys there; like if I was already at Duke.

In school, I'm currently taking engineering. This is my third year taking it. Some of the projects we work on are pretty exciting and different. We're making LEDs, circuit boards; we made a scoreboard the other day, actually.

I'm very excited to see that Harry Giles committed to Duke. That's my best friend and now he's coming to college with me—as well as Frank Jackson and Javin DeLaurier. It just looks like it's going to be a great season next year. We're all excited to be on this journey together.

Harry and I have been talking and I just want to keep him lifted because it's a sad thing to miss your senior year with the ACL injury. But he came back from it one time so there's no doubt he'll do it again.

SUPERGIRL

NATALIE CHOU Plano (TX) West, 6-0, G

When opponents would laugh, "Oh! I got the Asian. I got her!" Natalie Chou's competitive nature would spark, and she'd show those doubters what they were in for—a rough time. "Sometimes I feel like, me being Asian, that's what makes me stand out," she says. "During the game, I'd prove myself."

What those naysayers didn't realize about Chou? Basketball was in her blood. Her mother played professionally in China and continues to coach her to this day. "She taught me everything I know," the Plano (TX) West player said of her mother. "And she always believed in me."

Ever since first grade, Chou had a ball in her hands. During freshman year in high school, she took the sport more seriously, even trying out for USA Basketball. She didn't make the cut before her sophomore year, but the following summer she made the U17 team that traveled to France and the Czech Republic to claim a World Championship.

Now, Chou prepares to start her final high school season. Having recently committed to attending Baylor, Chou is excited for the future. "Never in a million years would I have thought that I'd have this opportunity," Chou said. Can't help but wonder where those doubters are now, because it's quite clear Natalie Chou got the last laugh. —HABEEBA HUSAIN



THE REVOLUTION

AMIR COFFEY Minnetonka (MN) Hopkins, 6-7, F



As the best prep player in Minnesota and the son of a former Gopher, Amir Coffey seemed destined to play for his state's flagship university. But his future coaching staff wasn't taking that for granted. "I heard from Coach Pitino the first week he got there, and I don't think I've gone more than two or three days without talking to them since," he says of Richard Pitino and his staff. "It just showed how much of a priority I was for them."

Three years later, the 6-7, 185-pound combo guard is

the star of a top-20 recruiting haul and a top-40 player in the 2016 class. As the son of former U of M stand-out Richard Coffey, Amir always had a soft spot for his dad's alma mater, but says his decision ultimately came down to a belief that he can thrive in the Gophers' system. Long and rangy, with solid handles, great court vision and a willingness to dime or drive as needed, he cites James Harden's game as an obvious model: "How he reads defenses, his decision mak-

ing, and he's a great scorer."

He's focused now on his final high school season and on adding some pounds to his frame before college. And about that: Coffey went down last December with a knee injury that required surgery. Not only was the surgery a success—he dominated all comers at a pre-season tournament in August—but doctors told Coffey he has the potential to grow another inch or two. No wonder the Gophers made sure he stayed home.

—RYAN JONES

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FROZEN MOMENT

ROOKIE DAYS

*Damian Lillard,
August, 2012*

They grow up so quickly, huh? Given his unconventional, under-the-radar path to the NBA, Dame Dolla seemed even more fresh-faced than the average rook when he arrived on the scene in '12. In a little more than three years, he's become a household name, a force in the sneaker industry and, most impressive in our opinion, a legit franchise player.



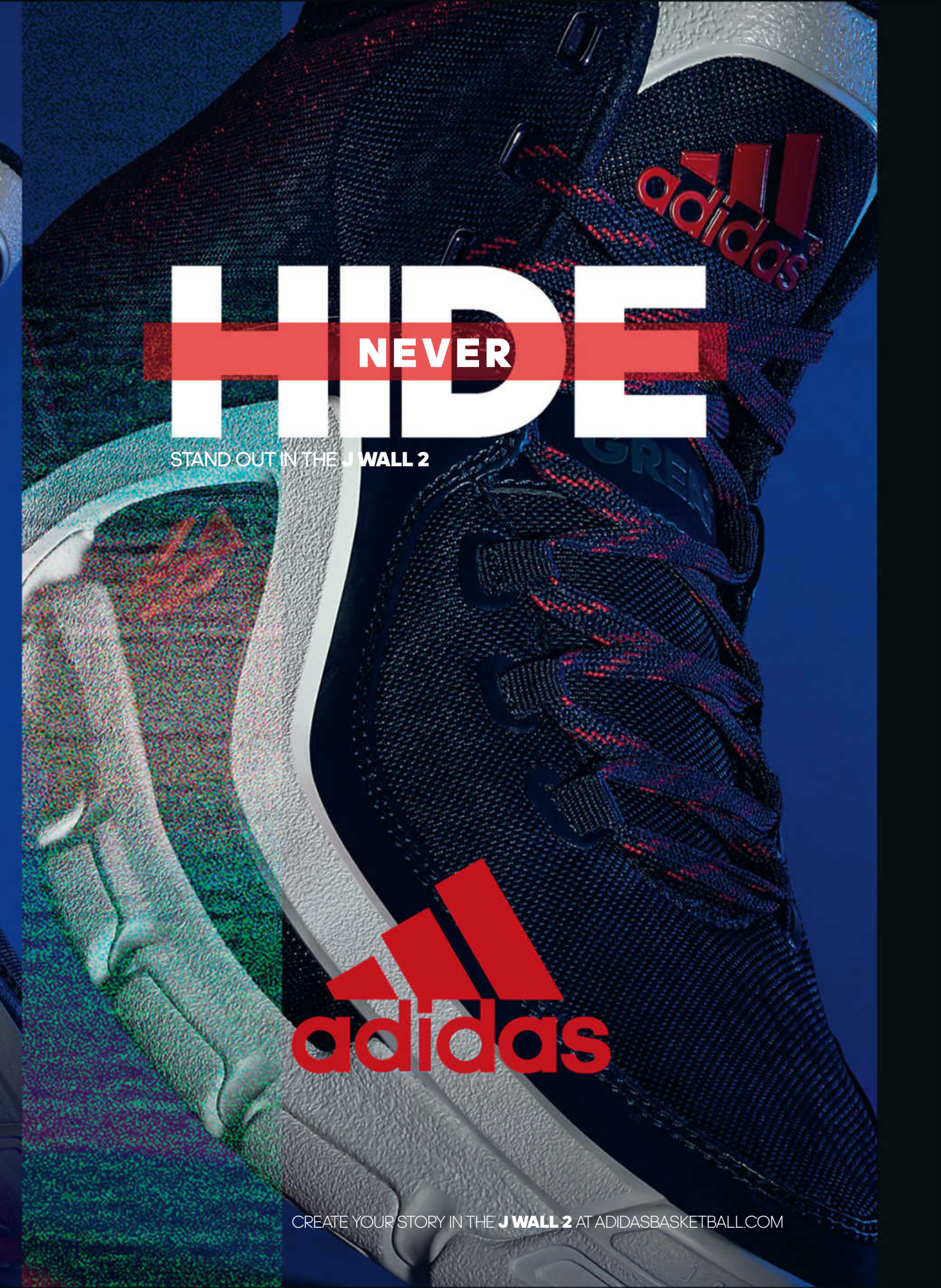
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